THEODOSIUS AND THE LIMITS OF EMPIRE

Mark Hebblewhite

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The emperor Theodosius I (AD 379–395) was one of the most remarkable figures of the late antique period. In the face of religious schism, political turmoil, and barbarian threats he managed to maintain imperial power and forge a political dynasty that would dominate both east and west for over half a century. This study, the first English language biography in over twenty-five years, traces his rise to power and tumultuous reign, and examines his indelible impact on a rapidly changing empire.

Mark Hebblewhite completed his PhD at Macquarie University, Australia in 2012 and has taught widely in the field of Ancient History. His research interests centre on the ideology and politics of the later Roman Empire, with particular reference to the role of the army. He currently works at the Australian Catholic University.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Hebblewhite, Mark, 1976- author.
Title: Theodosius and the limits of empire / Mark Hebblewhite.
Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge, [2020] |
Includes bibliographical references and index. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2019051556 (print) | LCCN 2019051557 (ebook) |
ISBN 9781138102989 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315103334 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Theodosius I, Emperor of Rome, 347-395 |
rome--history--theodosius I, the Great, 379-395. |
Emperors--Rome--Biography.
Classification: LCC DG330 .H43 2020 (print) | LCC DG330 (ebook) |
DDC 937/.08092 [B]--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019051556
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019051557

ISBN: 978-1-138-10298-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-10333-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Taylor & Francis Books

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Preface and acknowledgements

I must begin with a confession. When I decided to write an imperial biography, Theodosius I was not my first choice. I had intended to examine Constantius II or Valentinian I, but luckily my due diligence process discovered a number of projects were already underway for both these emperors. I say luckily, because as it turns out, while Theodosius has proved to be an enigmatic and at times frustrating figure of study, he was in the end a very satisfying subject.

Prior to beginning this project, I thought I understood Theodosius, the significance of his reign and the impact that he had on imperial history. However, during the course of researching and writing this biography I was forced to accept that a number of my long-held beliefs simply did not stand up to a close examination of the evidence. The Theodosius readers will find in these pages is a complex figure. He is neither the imposing behemoth nor the cause of the empire's demise that he has often been labelled. Instead, he was a figure whose impact on the empire was multifaceted, sometimes overt and immediate and at other times subtle and delayed.

With this book I have tried to achieve a delicate balance. While it has been written primarily as a useful resource for undergraduates, I also hope that it is accessible enough for lay readers who want nothing more than to enjoy an engaging read about a fascinating emperor and his age. However, given I did not set out to write yet another general work on the late antique period, I have by necessity focused strictly on Theodosius' reign, providing broader context only where it was essential to the story. Similarly, on the other end of the spectrum I was determined that this book remain a narrative biography, and while I ensured that it addressed important issues from Theodosius' reign with scholarly rigour, I was also careful not to unnecessarily deviate too far into issues that are best explored in dedicated journal articles. That said, I would be pleased if researchers found food for thought while leafing through these pages.

This book would not have been completed without the assistance of friends and colleagues both in Australia, and throughout the world. Dr Brian Croke, a formidable scholar of late antiquity, kindly read a number of key chapters, and in doing so made them much better. Dr Peter Brennan was (as always)

extremely generous with his time and advice, while Dr Peter Edwell yet again proved himself to be a font of common-sense solutions. I must also thank Dr Jeroen Wijnendaele for providing me with copies of his highly illuminating published, and un-published, work. Others, including Dr Ted Nixon, Dr Tim Scott, and Associate Professor Conor Whately, provided ongoing encouragement as this project wound ever onwards. Len Willan provided much-needed expertise in ensuring the best possible quality images. I would also like to thank the *Ancient World Mapping Centre*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for producing such high-quality maps. Of course, any errors in the following pages are mine and mine alone. I was again very fortunate to work with Michael Greenwood as my commissioning editor. His steady hand and no-nonsense approach ensured that this study has seen the light of day.

I could not have written this book without the love and support of Melissa Willan and Tobias Hebblewhite. They have sacrificed much for this project and I assure them that my promise to abstain from any new research projects in the near future will be honoured. In particular, I must note that Tobias, with his deft aesthetic instincts, was heavily involved in ensuring this book looked as striking as possible.

As I write this, the inhumane strains of King Diamond's legendary falsetto are resonating in the background. This reminds me that, as with past projects, music has been my constant companion over far too many solitary hours locked away in my study. Whether it be the death metal sounds of Stockholm and the swamps of Florida, the classic metal assault forged in Birmingham or even the gritty hardcore and deft lyricism of the streets of New York City: all kept me sane as I completed this book.

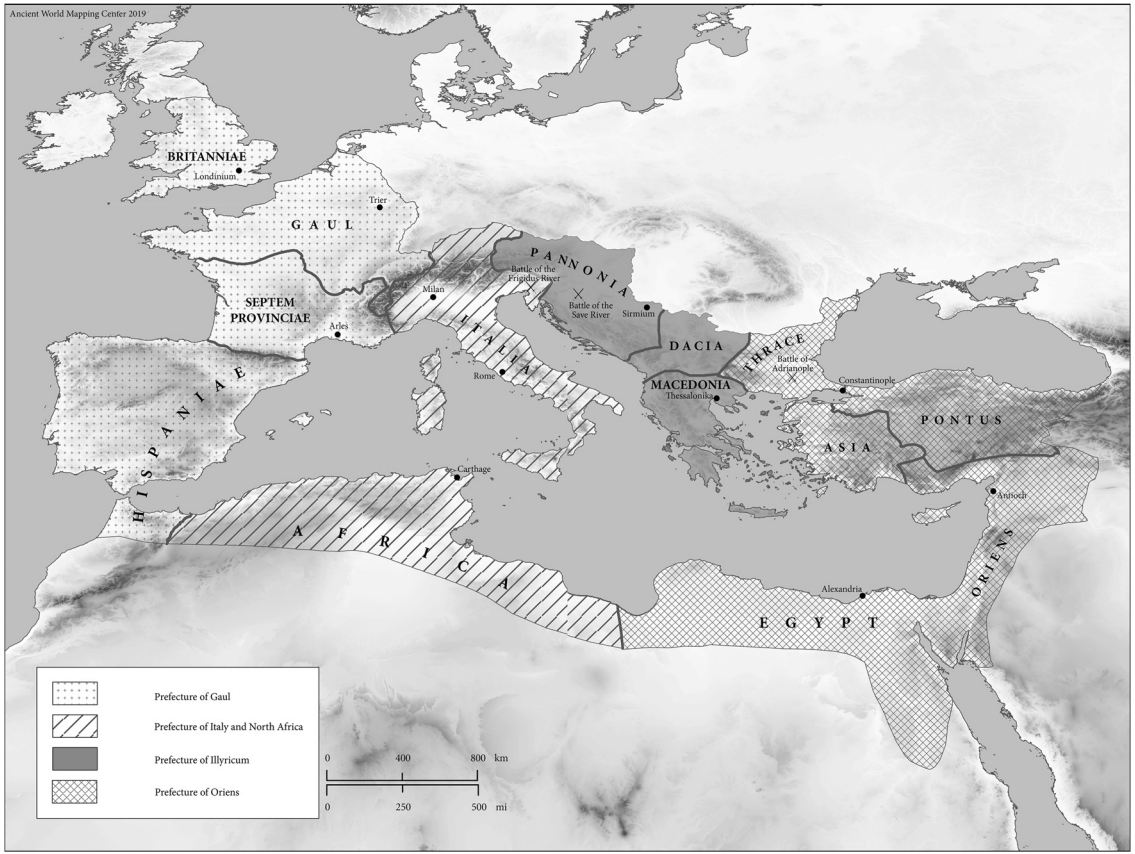
Abbreviations

Abbreviations of ancient texts and authors follow those listed between pages 1464–1476 of A.H.M. Jones (1986) *The Later Roman Empire*, Vol. 2, Baltimore. Those not contained in Jones follow the abbreviations set out in S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.) (1996) *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn, Oxford.

AE	*Le Anneé epigraphique* (Paris 1893–)
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (eds.) Th. Mommsen et al. (Berlin 1863–)
CTh.	*Theodosian Code*, (ed.) Th. Mommsen (Berlin, 1954); (tr.) C. Pharr (Princeton, 1952)
CJ	*Codex Iustinianus*, (ed.) P. Krueger, *Codex Iustinianus; Corpus Iuris Civilis*, Vol. 2 (Berlin, 1877)
Dig.	*Digesta seu Pandectae*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, (ed.) H.Dessau (Berlin 1892–1916).
JEH	*Journal of Ecclesiastical History*
JRMES	*Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NC	*Numismatic Chronicle*
NPNCF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Christian Fathers
PBSR	*Papers of the British School at Rome*
PLRE	*Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, (ed.) J. Martindale (Cambridge, 1971–1992)
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
RE	*Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1893–)
RIC	*Roman Imperial Coinage*
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool)
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

Timeline of significant events

c.347	Birth of Theodosius in Cauca, Spain
376	Execution of Theodosius the Elder (December)
–	Theodosius forced into temporary 'retirement' in Spain
377	Birth of Arcadius
–	Theodosius returns to active military service
378	Battle of Adrianople/death of the emperor Valens (August)
379	Theodosius raised to the rank of eastern Augustus at Sirmium (19 January)
–	Theodosius sets up court in Thessalonica
380	Theodosius suffers a life threatening illness and is baptised
–	Theodosius enters Constantinople (24 November)
382	Peace agreement reached with the Goths (October)
383	*Quinquennalia* of Theodosius & Arcadius crowned as Augustus (19 January)
–	Usurpation of Magnus Maximus and the death of Gratian (August)
384	Birth of Honorius (September)
386	Death of Pulcheria and Aelia Flaccilla
387	Theodosius marries Galla
388	Theodosius campaigns and defeats the forces of Magnus Maximus at Siscia and Poetovio. (July)
–	Magnus Maximus captured at Aquilea and executed. (August)
389	Theodosius enters Rome (June)
390	'Massacre of Thessalonica'
392	Death of Valentinian II (May)
–	Arbogast seizes power and appoints Eugenius as Western Emperor
393	Honorius crowned as Augustus (January)
394	Death of Galla
–	Theodosius defeats Eugenius and Arbogast at the Battle of the Frigidus River (September)
395	Theodosius dies in Milan (January)



Map 1 Roman Empire during the reign of Theodosius

Map 2 The Gothic Wars 378–382

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Introduction

When Flavius Theodosius was appointed emperor of the east at Sirmium on 19 January 379 he was front and centre in a fully blown crisis that he was now expected to help remedy.[1] His predecessor Valens had died just months earlier with the flower of the eastern armies at the Battle of Adrianople leaving the empire exposed to an influx of Gothic tribes hungry for land. The man who placed him on his throne, the western emperor Gratian was young and inexperienced, while his western colleague and half-brother Valentinian II was still a child. Neither had an answer to the crisis beyond appointing Theodosius, a competent soldier from Spain who was already in his early thirties. Apart from his military suitability for the role, his appointment was a surprise for a number of reasons. Theodosius' relationship with the family of his new imperial colleagues had in the past been at best complicated and at worst downright fractured. He was also alien to the culture and traditions of much of his new territory. He was a Latin-speaking westerner who would be expected to rule the Greek-speaking east and a Nicene Christian who now had authority over a church dominated by adherents of opposing doctrines. He was a man for the times but a man out of place.

Somehow Theodosius would not only weather the initial crisis he faced but would go on to outlive both of his imperial colleagues and during a reign of almost 16 years would briefly, but significantly, unify the empire under his sole rule. During this time his presence would be felt across the institutions that made up the military, religious, economic, and political life of the empire. In fact his influence was considered so great that his sudden death on 17 January 395 has long been considered a turning point in the history of the Roman Empire.

Although using individual events as historical markers can be problematic, in this case its use is not arbitrary, or for that matter a purely modern invention. There was a clear contemporaneous belief that Theodosius had been a significant emperor and that the end of his reign marked a change in the empire. A mere decade after his death he was hailed as "*Optimus ille divinum*" or "best of all the gods". Some fifty years later, at one of the more important of the interminable ecclesiastical gatherings of the fifth century, he was referred to with the sobriquet of '*megas*' – or 'great'.[2] In short, he was recognised

as an emperor who had radiated strength, and many felt that he had remodelled the empire in his own image. It's a portrait that in many ways remains with us today. For example, the nickname 'Great' will still be found in any number of works that refer to Theodosius.[3] Even those who hold a negative view of Theodosius and his legacy cannot deny the transformational nature of his reign. He was an emperor who left an indelible mark not only on imperial politics but also on the religious trajectory of the empire, in particular the rapid growth of a powerful and doctrinally uniform Christian church. His impact was also strongly felt in the vexed question of how the empire tried to accommodate its barbarian neighbours. The key question then is not whether Theodosius had a considerable legacy, but how should it be interpreted? The Theodosius you will read about in the following pages does cast a very long shadow, but he was neither a goliath imposing his unquestioned will on history, nor the hapless seed of the empire's eventual disintegration. Instead we will navigate the rule of an emperor who spent his entire reign buffeted by external pressures and internal turmoil but who somehow managed to not only survive for over a decade and a half but also (for better or worse) shape imperial history for many years to come.

The ancient sources

In comparison to many other emperors of the age, we possess a wealth of ancient material with which to construct our portrait of Theodosius, analyse his reign, and judge its impact. Given that this material is voluminous, diverse, and very much of a mixed quality, it is worth cataloguing it by type in order to better understand both the distinct benefits and significant challenges it offers as source material.

The most substantial body of evidence available to us, both in terms of volume and usefulness, is literary material (histories, chronicles, law codes, letters, panegyrics and other written materials). The first thing to note is that despite the size of this corpus, it is extremely uneven in its scope and detail. For example, on the subject of Theodosius' religious policies, in particular his aggressive approach to doctrinal conformity within the Christian church, we are extremely well informed by the works of contemporary figures, later historians, and surviving laws. This stands in stark contrast to the paucity of material we possess detailing Theodosius' rise to power or on the crucial agreement of 382 he signed with barbarian leaders that ended the Danubian crisis. An even more enduring problem is the uneven quality of our literary material. The least problematic in this respect is a large corpus of laws handed down by the emperor during his reign, most of which are preserved in the Theodosian Code, a document compiled by jurists in the reign of his grandson Theodosius II. Additional material can be found in later legal compilations, most prominently the Justinian Code. While we need to take into account that these laws were curated in a later age and should not be considered as the totality of Theodosius' legislative activity, they remain absolutely vital to our understanding of his reign.[4]

Far more challenging is the broad corpus of 'histories' and other historically significant literary works available to us.[5] Unfortunately, our most reliable source for the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus, chose to conclude his history with the disaster of Adrianople. Consequently, we lack a contemporary account similar to the generally dispassionate, and well-informed historical narrative he delivered for a number of Theodosius' predecessors. What material we do have is generally anything but dispassionate. We see this divide on full display with regards to Theodosius' character as both an emperor and a man. Depending on what source you read he was either a forgiving, benevolent, charitable, energetic, and courageous emperor who was diligent in his duties or a wrathful, indolent, and cruel tyrant, who was easily misled by those around him.[6]

Much of our material dates either from the reign of Theodosius itself or from its immediate aftermath. Theoretically, these sources should be the most accurate we possess as they are closest to the events they describe. Unfortunately, this material is often the most highly coloured. We possess numerous contemporary (or near contemporary) panegyrics, which are by nature highly stylised speeches with the sole purpose of flattering and praising its subject: the emperor.[7] We also have a wealth of material, mainly personal correspondence but also a number of orations, from some of the leading writers and statesmen of the age including Libanius, Symmachus, Gregory of Nazianzus and Ambrose of Milan. All are extremely valuable but must be used with care as they reflect the subject matter interests and, more crucially, the overt personal religious and political agendas of the writers. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of Ambrose. The bishop not only resided in the same city as Theodosius during the latter's stay in Italy but was also an active figure in some of the most controversial events of his reign. So, while his writings represent first-hand accounts of events it is important to note that they were carefully and retrospectively curated for public consumption.[8]

We also possess a wide range of literary sources dating from the century following Theodosius' death. The bulk of this material comes in the form of ecclesiastical histories, which are predominantly interested in the development of the Christian Church. Accordingly, as far as Theodosius is concerned, they focus on the impact he had on church doctrine and his role in what the writers perceived to be an ongoing 'conflict' between Christianity and the empire's traditional polytheistic, or 'pagan' religious beliefs.[9] The earliest of these histories was written by Rufinus in the very first years of the fifth century. He was followed by Socrates Scholasticus in the late 430s and Sozomen in the following decade. Finally, in 448 Theodoret, Bishop of Cyr, wrote a work that would go on to be highly influential in defining the reign of Theodosius. We must also add to this list the ecclesiastical history of Philostorgius which was written between 423–433 but which survives only as an epitome compiled by the ninth century writer Photius. Philostorgius belonged to one of the strands of Christianity that Theodosius considered heretical and his work forms an extremely valuable alternative narrative as it strays from the uniformly positive presentation of the emperor offered by other ecclesiastical historians, who agreed with the emperor's aggressive support of orthodox theology.

The quality of these ecclesiastical histories differs by author. Rufinus, who was based in Aquileia, benefits from writing in close proximity to the events he describes. He also must have had direct access to individuals who lived through the reign of Theodosius as well as contemporary documents lost to us. Socrates and Sozomen, who wrote at Constantinople, are well briefed on events in the eastern empire, and both benefited from close proximity to the imperial court and the written archives available in the capital city. Sozomen in particular was careful to utilise sources like the Theodosian Code.[10]

There are however significant drawbacks with these works. They are naturally almost wholly preoccupied with church affairs and thus offer only incidental insights into other areas of interest. Even major political events of the reign, such as usurpations, are only expanded upon if they serve to further the ecclesiastical interests of the writer. In addition, though each history differs slightly in form and focus, they are almost uniformly positive in their presentation of the emperor as both a champion of Nicene orthodoxy and an implacable foe of paganism. As we shall see, nowhere is this more prevalent than in the work of Theodoret, who at times goes far beyond admiration for Theodosius and dabbles in what can only be described as hagiography. Unfortunately, it is his fanciful presentation of Theodosius that has proved the most enduring and indeed, influential.[11]

We face the opposite problem in the only significant narrative history of Theodosius' reign – the *New History* of Zosimus. Zosimus was a fervent pagan who wrote at the beginning of the sixth century and who was determined to show the negative impact of Christianity on the course of imperial history. Much of his portrayal of Theodosius is based on the similarly hostile work of a contemporary historian, Eunapius of Sardis, of which we only possess fragments. His work is particularly important to our understanding of the imperial politics of Theodosius' reign, a number of major military campaigns and the emperor's efforts to deal with his barbarian neighbours. Problematically, we rely solely on Zosimus' work as evidence for many events in Theodosius' reign. Where the ecclesiastical historians are fawning in their treatment of Theodosius, Zosimus is unrelenting in his criticism and paints the emperor as weak, derelict in his duty and the catalyst for the ongoing decline of the empire.[12]

Other literary sources also aid in our understanding of the reign of Theodosius. Sometime before 418 the Spanish writer Orosius produced his *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, in which he dedicated a chapter to the reign of Theodosius. Despite filtering secular history through an unashamedly apologetic biblical lens, his work offers some useful details on the western usurpations of Magnus Maximus and Eugenius. Other important (yet 'niche') contributions from the Christian perspective are Augustine's *City of God*, a philosophical work which contains a long section praising the emperor for his faith and piety; and Paulinus' *Life of Ambrose*. The latter, despite being hagiographical in nature, is nonetheless important as it offers crucial evidence on the religious climate of the age and in particular about Ambrose's celebrated clashes with Theodosius. We

also possess epitomes from the fifth century 'anonymous epitomater' and the twelfth century writer Zonaras, and a number of chronicles dating from between the fifth and seventh centuries. While these are limited in terms of detail, they can sometimes offer hitherto unknown pieces of information. And in the case of the chronicles, they can be extremely valuable in helping us confirm the chronology of Theodosius' reign.[13]

Finally, and not inconsequentially, we have a detailed epigraphic and numismatic record of the emperor's reign, along with a mix of material evidence that includes everything from built structures to precious artefacts. Used carefully, this material offers a contemporary window on many aspects of Theodosius' reign.[14]

Modern perspectives

Unsurprisingly, modern scholarship on Theodosius, both covering the events of his reign and his legacy, is voluminous. Accordingly, this work has sought to engage with the widest possible range of this scholarship to not only ensure that a range of perspectives are acknowledged but also so that the reader has an extensive and up to date bibliography that can be mined for further investigation and research.

It will be useful however to make a few broad points about the state of scholarship on Theodosius and his reign. First, similar chasms exist in the body of modern scholarship on Theodosius to those found in our ancient source material. Just as Zosimus and Theodoret present diametrically opposed portraits of the emperor's character and his stewardship of the empire, so do modern commentators. There are many works that simply follow the underlying biases of our ancient sources and paint Theodosius as either the last 'real emperor' of the empire, or conversely the cause of its ultimate decline and fall, although scholarship from recent decades has trended towards delivering a more nuanced outlook. The most passionate debates remain linked to the emperor's attitude towards paganism, and because of the subsequent and rapid disintegration of the western empire in the fifth century, his approach towards accommodating the empire's barbarian neighbours.[15]

Second, much of the modern scholarship also mimics the ancient source material in another way as it gravitated towards the few hotly debated aspects of Theodosius' reign, while ignoring many other less well-known aspects of his rule. Aside from general works covering the broad late antique period, there is relatively speaking much less interest in developing a more holistic view of his reign. In fact, there are surprisingly few biographies of Theodosius, and only one in English, now over a quarter of a century old.[16] This deficit in the scholarship is a large reason for the current volume.

An empire inherited

By the time Theodosius became co-emperor in 379 the empire had long been in the grip of a sustained period of political, social, economic, and religious

change. Identifying and acknowledging Theodosius' role in these currents of change, whether as an instigator, collaborator, or even as an unwilling victim, will be a key concern for this work. It will be useful therefore to identify and broadly overview some of the important historical trends that not only created the circumstances for his rise but in many ways determined the priorities of his reign.

The obvious place to start is with the emperor Constantine (306–337), as it was his rise to power that cemented once and for all the primacy of dynastic rule, where imperial power would again be based on hereditary succession. It was a principle that would guide imperial politics, throughout the fourth century and beyond. His usurpation in 306 to the position of western emperor, along with the similar action of Maxentius in Rome, were the sparks that would quickly bring Diocletian's Tetrarchic experiment, where imperial power was shared among militarily talented colleagues, to a shuddering halt.[17] In 325 Constantine dispatched his last standing opponent (Licinius) to consolidate imperial power exclusively within his family. However, despite carefully creating a complex web of shared power among his blood relatives, his designs broke down almost immediately after his death in a spectacular intra-family bloodbath. This was then followed by a predictable pattern of multiple usurpations launched both from within and outside of the family. The dynasty came to an end with the death of the emperor Julian on campaign in Persia in 363.[18] After eight months of his short-lived successor Jovian's rule, the empire immediately returned to a dynastic model of power with the elevation of Valentinian I, who was forced by the army to choose an imperial partner. In an indication of just how strongly entrenched the dynastic mindset now was, Valentinian I chose his brother Valens in the face of significant opposition. Later, during a serious illness, Valentinian I, bereft of adult male family members, turned to his eight-year-old son Gratian rather than look for support outside the family.[19] After his death, the even younger Valentinian II was foisted upon the empire. As we will see, the circumstances of Theodosius' own rise to power were oddly anomalous with this established system but in the end his grim determination to deliver his own dynastic power arrangements would form the *raison d'être* of his reign.

Along with the dynastic imperative, imperial politics in the fourth century was defined by multi-emperor rule. In an attitude that echoes back to the Tetrarchy, emperors of the fourth century realised that the geographic scope of the empire left them horribly exposed to the threat of usurpation. With significant pressures on numerous borders, this was an age in which an imperial presence was demanded by those under threat. Given the emperor could only be physically present on one frontier at a time, he needed to ensure that his authority was represented elsewhere in the empire. Constantine had tried to solve this by splitting his empire between a number of dynastic heirs, but his plans ended in civil war. From the reign of Constantius II onwards the division of the empire reflected a dynastic pyramid where one dominant ruler used family members to prop up his political flanks. For Constantius II, it was his half-cousins Gallus and Julian in the subordinate rank of Caesar. For

Valentinian I, it was his brother and son. The example set by this 'dynastic pyramid' model was a clear influence on how Theodosius constructed his own regime and planned for its future.[20]

While imperial rule arguably became more decentralised in the course of the fourth century because the empire was commonly split between numerous emperors, the actual machinery of government became far more concentrated – an innovation that we can again trace back to Constantine and his Tetrarchic predecessors. Emperors would rarely stay in one place and the highly influential officials who advised him would often travel with the emperor wherever he went. This web of officials, and the growing bureaucracy that served them, was one of the defining aspects of fourth century imperial rule.[21]

Politics and economics were closely linked in the Roman empire and during the fourth century we see the increasing economic weight that the machinery of imperial government had placed on the rest of the empire. Taxation, both in currency and in kind, represented a heavy burden on society, particularly those in the lower classes. In turn local elites (*curiales*), responsible for collecting taxes, became hollowed out as young men across the empire sought to avoid their responsibilities.[22]

As important as these political and economic trends were in setting the scene for the eventual reign of Theodosius, by far the most radical shift of the fourth century, and one of the most consequential for our study, was the changing religious landscape of the empire. Before Constantine the empire was solidly polytheistic in belief and at times overtly hostile to monotheistic belief systems such as Christianity that demanded total obedience to one god.[23] This changed radically under the rule of Constantine and his family. Their patronage of what had previously been an obscure monotheistic cult unleashed the most significant religious change in Rome's history. Christianity quickly became the de facto state religion, with active Christians becoming cemented into the civil, military, and religious hierarchy of the empire. In fact, there is a good argument to make that Constantine's active sponsorship of Christianity sprang partially from the great political potential he saw in this monotheistic religion.[24]

Unlike past religious shifts within the empire, Constantine's sponsorship of Christianity caused a great deal of turmoil. Previously, the empire had been a polytheistic melting pot that had seamlessly subsumed and, in some cases, remodelled a diverse range of beliefs in a generally peaceful fashion. The radical monotheism of Christianity however would never accept co-existing with this traditional patchwork of polytheistic beliefs. Increasingly aided by the weight of the imperial government, the church set out to actively erase the empire's polytheistic past. By the time Theodosius rose to power, the Christian church had become the most powerful religious organisation in the empire, although traditional polytheists still retained a great deal of influence, particularly in institutions such as the army.

With the rise to prominence of Christianity came a new, and for much of the empire, alien religious concept: heresy.[25] Unlike in polytheistic religious

traditions, in the Christian religion there could only be one correct interpretation of religious doctrine. Those who did not conform with this doctrine were considered heretics – enemies of the true faith. This attitude was particularly pronounced when it came to the nature of the divine and the true relationship between the components of the holy trinity. Debate on this topic raged throughout the fourth century and many emperors actively inserted themselves into the controversy. As a consequence, the imperial power often found itself adjudicating many fractious and seemingly never-ending confrontations on issues of church doctrine.

The most consequential disagreement revolved around the ideas of a presbyter in the city of Alexandria named Arius. He argued that since God is "the eternal and unknowable monad . . . that the son could not be god in the same sense". Or in other words, Christ, while divine, was in the end subordinate to the father.[26] He was fiercely opposed by those who believed that the father and the son were identical in essence and declared a heretic. In 325, Constantine convened a gathering of clergy from throughout the empire to decide on (among other things) the question of the nature of the father and son. The outcome was the highly influential 'Nicene Creed' which came down decisively in favour of the opponents of Arius, led by Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, but which did nothing to heal the divisions within the church. Opponents of the creed were exiled but remained unbowed. After Constantine's death, the dispute took on a distinctly geographical character. In the west the Nicene position was dominant but, in the east, under the sponsorship of his imperial successors Constantius II and Valens, the Arian, or at least 'non-Nicene' viewpoint flourished.[27] It was this longstanding split within the church that defined the religious landscape faced by Theodosius when he became emperor in the east. How he chose to approach this conflict would in some ways become a defining characteristic of his time in power.

Along with growing religious turmoil, Theodosius also inherited a geopolitical crisis that would heavily impact the course of his reign. In the first half of the fourth century the frontiers of the empire were relatively stable. Thanks to the vigorous campaigns of the Tetrarchs and then Constantine, the empire was able to strongly rebound from the territorial fragmentation that occurred during the third century crisis. However, this stability was lost in the second half of the century as pressures again increased on almost all the empire's frontiers. The first significant territorial losses came in the east thanks to the disastrous Persian campaign led by the emperor Julian.[28] Close on its heels came the sudden collapse of the Danubian frontier under Valens that culminated in the devastating Battle of Adrianople in 378. As we will see, the Gothic flood it unleashed into the empire was the defining event that led to Theodosius' unlikely rise as emperor and its consequences impacted not only the course of his reign, but that of his dynastic successors.

The current volume has been structured in a broadly chronological fashion, but with a defined thematic eye to the overarching narrative of Theodosius' continual struggle to maintain power, first for himself, and then for his

children. Part One will chart the emperor's rise to power and the immediate struggles he faced as a new emperor. Chapter 1 charts his unlikely journey to imperial rank, while Chapter 2 examines his handling of the still critical Gothic invasion which had to be defeated before he could truly secure himself as emperor. Chapter 3 examines the way in which he built a regime from scratch while in Chapter 4 we will look at the religious revolution Theodosius launched in the eastern church and the reasons behind it.

Part Two will concentrate on Theodosius' efforts to entrench his power in the east and his response to the changing political landscape of the west. Chapter 5 examines his efforts to start forging his own dynasty and his initial responses to the unforeseen death of Gratian at the hands of the usurper Magnus Maximus. Chapter 6 traces the course of the civil war between Theodosius and Magnus Maximus and then, upon its conclusion, Theodosius' efforts to ensure dynastic security in the face of a radically new power reality.

Part Three will examine the chaotic later years of Theodosius' reign as he struggled to consolidate his dynasty's hold over the entire empire. Chapter 7 is dedicated to the celebrated series of conflicts between the emperor and Ambrose of Milan, including the infamous 'Massacre of Thessalonica'. Chapter 8 looks at the sudden onslaught of anti-pagan legislation issued by the emperor and examines in detail the idea that Theodosius had an agenda designed to 'destroy' paganism. In Chapter 9 we explore the unexpected death of Valentinian II; the subsequent rebellion of Eugenius and Arbogast; and the rationale behind Theodosius' response.

This study will conclude with an overview of Theodosius' legacy on the empire. Was he the last 'great' Roman emperor? Or were the policies he implemented the catalyst for the rapid breakup and decline of a once great and united empire?

Notes

1 The emperor is generally referred to as Theodosius 1 or Theodosius 'the Great' but will simply be referred to as Theodosius in the course of this work.
2 Claudian *de VI cos. Hon.* 55f. Leppin (2003) 231 notes that at first this distinction ('the great') was simply a way to differentiate him, Theodosius I, from his grandson Theodosius II. It took on the idea of 'historically significant' at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 due to his promotion of Nicene Christianity. See Leppin (2003) 259, fn. 9 and Lippold (1968) 138, fn. 1 for a full list of references.
3 Maraval's 2009 biography carries the title *Theodose Le Grand*, Leppin's 2003 work is *Theodosius der Grosse (Auf Dem Weg zum Christlichen Imeprium)* and Lippold's 1968 work is entitled *Theodosius der Grosse und seine Zeit*. Casual references exist as well – Burns (1994) 43; Southern & Dixon (1996) 2. Of course, use of the sobriquet does not mean unquestioning acceptance. Both Lippold (1968) 129–135 and Leppin (2003) 229–240, among others, spend time discussing whether Theodosius 'deserves' the title.
4 Theodosius' laws are preserved in a number of key documents the most important of which are the Theodosian Code and Justinian's Code. Honoré (1998) 33–76 provides an indispensable overview of the emperor's surviving legislation. Harries (1999) provides is a useful overview of the law in the late antique period. See p 59ff

for a specific discussion of the Theodosian Code. Errington (2006) 87ff also provides a succinct introduction to the code and its significance.

5 Rohrbacher (2002) 274–288 offers a useful overview of this material. See also Cameron (1998) 684–691 for a more general overview.

6 Maraval (2009) 302ff succinctly reviews these diverse views.

7 On the genre of panegyric and its use as historical evidence see Nixon & Rodgers (1994) 33ff.

8 Neil McLynn's *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (McLynn 1994) remains the most insightful work on this celebrated figure. Liebeschuetz (2005) is useful in any discussion on the historical worth of the bishop's voluminous writings.

9 The term 'pagan' will be used throughout this book as a useful shorthand for polytheistic religious beliefs. On the origins of the term see Fowden (2005) 521–522.

10 See Errington (1997b) 398–443 for a critical discussion of how these writers (and others) dealt with the religious legislation of Theodosius.

11 Theodoret's preoccupation with divine influence at critical junctures in Theodosius' career, not to mention his view that Theodosius was directly carrying out the agenda of the Christian god on earth will be clearly displayed as we trace the emperor's career. His dramatic description of Theodosius' conflict with Ambrose has also proved enduring – see Chapter Seven of the current work.

12 On Eunapius and Theodosius see Buck (1988) 36–53. For a broad overview of Eunapius as a historian see Blockley (1981) 1–26. Paschoud's commentary contained in his French language translation of Zosimus is indispensable to our understanding of his strengths and weaknesses as a historian. The relevant volume for us covers Book Four of Zosimus' history and was published in 2003. Also useful is Ridley (1972) 277–302 and Ridley (1982) xi–xv.

13 Croke (1983) 116–131 and Croke (1990) 165–203 provides a useful overview of the genre of 'Chronicle' and its use in the study of history

14 Coinage from the reign of Theodosius is collected in *Roman Imperial Coinage* Volume IX. Epigraphic material can be found in the relevant volumes of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL) and *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (ILS).

15 Scholarship on these individual debates will be noted at the appropriate junctures of this work.

16 The English language biography of Theodosius is that of Williams & Friell (1994). There are biographies of Theodosius in both German – Lippold (1968) and Leppin (2003) and in French – Maraval (2009) and Lançon (2014).

17 On the Tetrarchy see Leadbetter (2009) 2–6 and Bowman (2005) 69–89. Lee (2007) 27ff offers a useful discussion of the tension between hereditary succession and military capability.

18 There is of course a staggering range of material available on Constantine and his dynasty. Useful starting points can be found in Jones (1964) 77–137; Hunt (1998) 1–77 and Cameron (2005) 90–109.

19 See Lenski (2002) 23–25 on Valentinian's decision to choose Valens as his co-emperor. On Gratian's appointment to the rank of Augustus see McEvoy (2013) 49–55.

20 On Gallus and Julian as Caesars of Constantius II see Blockley (1972).

21 See Kelly (1998) 162–175 and Jones (1964) 366–373 and 563–606.

22 On taxation in the Later Roman Empire see MacMullen (1988) 41–44; Duncan-Jones (1990) 199–210; Garnsey & Whittaker (1998) 312–370; Jones (1964) 61–68; 110; 119–120; 130–131; 146–148; 411–469 and Delmaire (1989) 239–417. On the decline of the *curiales* see Ward-Perkins (1998) 373ff; Jones (1964) 712–766; Millar (1983) and Laniado (2002). Theodosius and his immediate predecessors were particularly concerned with this phenomenon. Errington (2006) 104 notes that no fewer than 83 separate laws were issued on the subject between 363–395.

23 Some scholars have identified growing monotheistic tendencies in pagan religious beliefs during the third century – see Beard, North & Price (1998) 1.286 and the volume by Athanassiadi & Frede (1999). This is a complex area of research, but it is at the very least important to recognise that the rise of Christianity was most likely part of a greater religious trend and did not 'come from nowhere'.
24 The relevant volumes of the CAH offer accessible accounts of the rise of Christianity. For the third century see Clarke (2005) 589–671. For the growth of the church under Constantine and his sons see Cameron (2005) 90–109. Also useful is Cameron (1993) 47–84; Drake (2006) 111–136 and Edwards (2006) 137.
25 On the concept of heresy and the origins of the word itself see Chadwick (1998) 561. On why heresy was such a preoccupation for the Christian faith see Fowden (1998) 559.
26 Jones (1964) 86.
27 Constantius II wasn't so much an overt supporter of the Arian position as he was a pragmatist who attempted throughout his reign to engineer a compromise theological position that would bring stability to the Church. For his troubles he was labelled as a tyrant and a heretic –see Flower (2016) 1–20; Diefenbach (2015) 353–378; Hunt (1998) 32–37 and Fowden (1998) 567–573. On Valens' support for Arianism see Lenski (2002) 241–263.
28 The most comprehensive modern account of the campaign is contained in Volumes 5 and 6 of the *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus;* den Boeft et al. (2001–2005). Also useful is Matthews (1989) 130–179.

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Part I

A new power in the east

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1 An inevitable rise to power?

The house of Theodosius

Theodosius was born in Cauca, Spain, in the province of Gallaecia, on the 11th January, c. 347.[1] Despite the efforts of our sources to emphasise the nobility of Theodosius' ancestors – some go as far as to create a familial link with the emperor Trajan – his family was an unremarkable cog in the minor provincial aristocracy of the west.[2] This changed with the ascendancy of his father Flavius Theodosius (usually referred to as Theodosius 'the Elder'). Like many others of his age with obscure origins, Theodosius the Elder used the army to gain a prominence he would otherwise never have had. We know little of his early life beyond the fact he married one Thermantia, and presumably was of Spanish origin or at least had a strong connection to the area.[3] He first appears in our sources as a commander in Britain (368–369) during the so called 'Great Conspiracy'. He seems to have already earned a strong reputation for military success as "a man most favourably known for his services in war" and Valentinian trusted him to conduct the campaign after a number of other commanders had failed.[4] Ammianus recounts his lightning approach to Boulogne, from where he landed at Rutupiae (Richborough) and hastened to Londinium, after which he scoured the countryside of predatory barbarians and returned peace to the south of Britain. He then moved to restore the integrity of the northern borders, scoring numerous successes and adding a new province to Rome's domain in Valentia.[5] It is likely that the future emperor joined his father on this campaign, although we have no evidence of his role or rank.[6]

Having achieved success in Britain, Theodosius the Elder returned to Valentinian's court in 369 where "he was received with joy and words of praise and succeeded to the position of Jovinus, commander of the cavalry forces, whom the emperor Valentinian considered to be lacking in energy"[7] (trans. Rolfe). Now at the pinnacle of the western military establishment he was unleashed against the Alamanni. Attacking through Raetia he scored a major victory, which led to a significant resettlement of prisoners on the banks of the River Po.[8] He then took part in Valentinian's successful campaign across the Rhine against the Alamannic king Macrianus and may have

even campaigned against the Sarmatians before being sent to North Africa in 373 to put down the revolt of Firmus, a chieftain of the Iubaleni, who had declared himself Augustus.[9] It is around this time that we have our first concrete evidence for his son's career. Around 373/4 Theodosius was appointed as a military commander in the province of Moesia (*dux Moesiae Primae*), perhaps to maintain the gains that his father made in the area against the Sarmatians before departing for North Africa. This appointment strongly suggests that Theodosius had built his own independent military reputation, likely by participating in his father's many successful campaigns.[10]

Theodosius' posting to North Africa, and his son's promotion, demonstrate the esteem in which the family was now held by Valentinian I. They were now more than just competent soldiers: they were trusted partisans of the emperor. Given this, Theodosius the Elder's appointment to the North African command should have been his finest moment. Instead it was the cause of a sudden and baffling downfall. The mission started well. He immediately neutralised the nefarious Count of Africa (*comes africae*) Romanus, whose corrupt behaviour had created the conditions that led to the insurrection. Following this he successfully campaigned against the tribal groups who had supported Firmus, with his success leading to the usurper being betrayed and killed by his own allies.[11] By mid-374 Theodosius had successfully returned North Africa to peace. He was in a seemingly strong position as a leading general who had rendered years of impressive service to what can only have been a grateful emperor. At the very least Theodosius the Elder must have felt that his family would have a permanent home among the western elite, and no doubt hoped that his son would one day achieve a similar rank to his own. However, in a perplexing turn of events, a mere 18 months later Theodosius the Elder was arrested and executed at Carthage. As we will see below, understanding the circumstances of this event is crucial to understanding the remarkable accession of Theodosius to the purple some four years later. As for the future emperor himself, he somehow escaped the fate of his unfortunate father. Following his successful independent command as *dux Moesiae*, during which time he enjoyed success against the Sarmatians, Theodosius retreated to his family's estates in Spain. There he would marry Aelia Flavia Flaccilla, and in 377 welcome the birth of his first son, Flavius Arcadius.[12] However, enduring obscurity was not in the cards for Theodosius, now in his early 30s. As the panegyrist Pacatus would proclaim many years later "How veiled always the plans of Fortune."[13] An event was about to occur that would lead to a most unlikely political resurrection.

A return to favour

In the decades leading up to Theodosius' accession, the empire had faced significant pressures on numerous frontiers. The eastern emperor Valens had spent long periods in Antioch vainly trying to re-establish Roman hegemony in the east after the disastrous Persian campaign of the emperor Julian, and

the humbling treaty signed by his successor Jovian, which had seen Rome cede significant swathes of territory to the Sassanian regime.[14] In the west Valentinian had faced severe disruptions in Britain and was forced to campaign vigorously against both the Alamanni and the Quadi to ensure the integrity of Rome's north-western frontier. His successor Gratian inherited this struggle and as late as mid-378 was forced to campaign across the Rhine against the Lentienses.[15]

But these long-running struggles were dwarfed by a crisis on the Danubian frontier that formed the hinge between the western and eastern territories of the empire (see Map 2). Rome had a long history of conflict with Gothic peoples beyond the Danube, and Valens himself had campaigned against the Greuthungi and Tervingi between 367–369.[16] However, the threat was to become far more pronounced in 376 thanks to events to the north of the empire's borders, where a nomadic people known as the Huns had migrated into the territory of the Greuthungi and the Tervingi, who lived near Rome's Thracian border. Both tribes were unable to withstand the newcomers and sought entry into the empire as refugees. Initially, Valens allowed the Tervingi entry but refused entry to the Greuthungi. Based in Antioch, where he was facing off with Shapur over Armenia, Valens then left the Gothic issue in the hands of subordinates. Thanks to their mismanagement, particularly the attempted extortion of the Gothic refugees, what should have been a peaceful transfer and settlement of the Goths in the empire became a bloodbath. Roman forces in the area were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of refugees, who quickly took up arms in the face of horrendous treatment. Joined by the Greuthungi, who crossed the now porous Danubian frontier, and later groups of Alans, Taifali and even Huns; the Tervingi under their leader Fritigern ransacked Thrace. Even with military assistance from Gratian's court, the barbarians could not be dislodged from the empire.[17] Realising the situation was growing desperate, Valens returned to Constantinople in the spring of 378 to in prepare for a major campaign to restore the situation. The story of the campaign is well-known. Although receiving assurances from Gratian and his generals that military assistance would arrive from the west, Valens, seeing the chance to gain singular glory, rashly decided to confront a Gothic force gathered at Adrianople. In the ensuing battle his army was obliterated and Valens was killed, leaving only a reputation as the man who had led Rome to its worst defeat since the Battle of Edessa, if not the Teutoburg Forest.[18]

An accidental emperor?

The Battle of Adrianople has long been considered a turning point in the fortunes of the empire. Leaving aside the longer-term consequences there is no doubt that it left the empire in immediate peril. With an estimated two-thirds of the eastern army destroyed, vast swathes of Roman territory lay undefended.[19] Just as importantly the defeat created a power vacuum in the east. Valens' son and presumptive heir Valentinianus Galates had died some

years earlier, while his two daughters were young, unmarried, and in no position to carry on the dynasty.[20] What's more, most of the military leadership of the eastern army, which formed the most obvious pool for an imperial replacement, had been decimated in the battle.[21] Those who survived were unsuitable due to inexperience, lack of political networks, or in the case of the Master of Cavalry (*magister equitum*) Victor, ethnic origin.[22] In the absence of any serious eastern candidate, or even a cabal of influential officials, the western ruler Gratian was now de-facto emperor of the east. But with this power came a hard political reality. The empire had not been under control of one man since the short-lived reign of Jovian and Gratian was faced with an immediate and difficult decision – take on the administration of the entire empire, which would have meant taking responsibility for re-stabilising the Danubian frontier, or appoint a co-emperor. We must not underestimate the fact that Gratian was forced into making this choice in the shadow of one of the greatest psychological traumas to ever beset the empire. That Ammianus, writing decades later in Rome, could liken the defeat to Cannae, shows the depths of this despair.[23]

When Gratian learnt of the defeat he was on his way to support Valens. We can only imagine the atmosphere within the confines of the imperial court when news of the tragedy reached them.[24] No doubt the panic intensified when news leaked out to the gathered army. While the death of an emperor was always a politically precarious time, the death of an emperor in circumstances such as this was a fully blown crisis. Even though he had been independently ruling the west since 375, Gratian was only 19 years old and in many ways still hostage to the senior figures from his father's regime. Zosimus states that the young emperor immediately realised he could not rule the empire alone but really we have little to no idea of what Gratian really thought.[25]

There were three practical options open to him. First, rule the empire alone. Second, appoint his half-brother and co-emperor Valentinian II to rule the east. Third, appoint a new eastern emperor. If we take Zosimus at face value, the first option was immediately ruled out. That doesn't mean however that Gratian wasn't tempted to take this course. His relationship with his uncle Valens had been fractured and the thought of sole rule with no competing Augustus would be intoxicating for a young emperor yet to free himself from his father's legacy. That said, no emperor of the dynasty had yet ruled alone. The army had forced Valentinian I to choose an imperial partner upon coming to power and had then raised up Valentinian II upon his death as a partner for Gratian.[26] They clearly felt that the empire was too large to rule alone. If Valentinian II (at that stage only eight years old) had been older, the second option would have been an obvious one. Gratian could have sent him east with trusted advisors, thereby retaining his family's grip over the entire empire. However, with the Gothic incursion threatening Thrace, Moesia, and Pannonia, there was no way the army would support such a solution.[27] In the end Gratian chose the third, and probably only, option available to him and appointed another emperor. But given the five-month lacuna between Adrianople and Theodosius' eventual accession, one

wonders just how willingly the emperor took his choice. Did he resist having to choose an imperial colleague? Or was it just a resistance to the individual who he would eventually crown?

Despite the views of our pro-Theodosian sources, his choice as eastern emperor was far from inevitable. Indeed, it was more improbable than inevitable. The questions surrounding Theodosius' re-emergence onto the political scene are legion. But one question dominates above all: How could a man, whose father was executed under the watch of the Valentinian regime, and who was forced into obscurity, now be raised to the rank of Augustus? Our sources are not particularly helpful in trying to unravel this mystery. Either the information they provide is cursory, which in itself is puzzling given the significance of the event, or bordering on hagiographical. Both extremes are explained by the fact that the vast majority of our source material was written during the reign of Theodosius himself, or in the shadow of his achievements and under the watchful eyes of his successors. Thus, any negative circumstances surrounding his rise were likely to be ignored or spun favourably. Our Christian sources are the best example of this phenomenon. Most date from the fifth century and view Theodosius as a hero who not only crushed paganism but banished heretical creeds of Christianity to establish the true church.

Even his initial rise to power is viewed through this lens, as we see in the account of Theodoret who gives the most expansive description of the circumstances that led to Theodosius' accession. He first lays out why Gratian chose Theodosius, saying:

> Now at this time Theodosius, on account alike of the splendour of his ancestry, and of his own courage, was a man of high repute. For this reason being from time to time stricken by the envy of his rivals, he was living in Spain, where he had been born and brought up. The emperor, being at a loss what measures to take, now that the barbarians, puffed up by their victory, both were and seemed well near invincible, formed the idea that a way out of his difficulties would be found in the appointment of Theodosius to the supreme command. He therefore lost no time in sending for him from Spain, appointing him commander in chief and dispatching him at the head of the assembled forces.

There Theodosius, "defended by his faith", slaughtered the barbarian invaders, winning a victory so complete that Gratian did not believe him when he came back to report his success. While Gratian was verifying this victory, Theodosius received a divine vision of his future:

> The great general remained, and then saw a wonderful vision clearly shown him by the very God of the universe himself. In it he seemed to see the divine Meletius, Bishop of Antioch, investing him with an imperial robe, and placing on his head an imperial crown. The morning after the

> night in which he had seen the vision he told it to one of his intimate friends, who pointed out that the meaning of the dream was plain and had nothing ambiguous about it.

Of course, Gratian now had no choice but to make Theodosius emperor:

> A few days went by when the commissioners sent to investigate the battle returned and reported that vast multitudes of the barbarians had been shot down. Then the emperor was convinced that he had done right well in selecting Theodosius for the command and appointed him emperor and gave him the sovereignty over Valens territory.[28]
>
> (trans. Jackson with revisions)

This account encapsulates the many problems we have trying to understand Theodosius' unlikely rise to power. The timetable of, and reasons for his 'return' to active service are vague and truncated, and the divine elements, in particular the intervention of the bishop Meletius, serve only to remind us how Theodosius' later mystique skews our source's view of his rise to power.[29]

The first step in unravelling how Theodosius became emperor is to establish a credible timeline for his return to active service. First, we must abandon the idea found in many of our sources that Theodosius was recalled in the wake of Adrianople. As Errington notes given the short period of time between Adrianople and Theodosius' coronation it is highly unlikely that Gratian was able to make the decision to recall him from Spain in time for Theodosius to campaign in the dead of winter and obtain such stunning successes that Gratian decided to immediately crown him as co-emperor.[30] Instead, Theodosius must have been recalled to service prior to Adrianople and was probably already on active duty, in or somewhere near the Danubian theatre. This earlier recall is suggested in a number of sources that hint at Theodosius holding multiple military commands before achieving the purple. While Theodoret insinuates that Theodosius was immediately elevated to the highest of military ranks on his return (Socrates and Sozomen ignore even this and state he was designated Augustus straight away), it is more likely that he returned to the rank he had previously held: *dux moesiae*. This lower rank could be why Themistius refers to Theodosius winning victories with "scant forces".[31]

The actual campaigning successes Theodosius enjoyed before becoming emperor are also a matter for debate. A key plank of Theodoret's argument is that Theodosius was made emperor because of his immediate successes in checking a barbarian force strongly insinuated to be the Goths who had defeated Valens at Adrianople. However, two key sources, writing much closer to the event, say that Theodosius' success was against the Sarmatians – not the Goths. It is for this campaigning, which pre-dates Adrianople, that he was promoted to the rank of either Master of Cavalry or Master of Soldiers.[32]

Theodoret has clearly invented a Gothic victory in order to explain why Gratian made the unorthodox choice of Theodosius to be his co-emperor. But if Theodosius didn't hand the Goths a stunning defeat in Rome's hour of need – why did Gratian hand half the empire to a someone who would have been considered an 'enemy' of his House? In fact – why did Gratian allow Theodosius to return to service at all?

To answer this vexing question we must return to the sudden and mysterious execution of Theodosius the Elder in North Africa and the 'retirement' of his son. According to Jerome, Theodosius was executed in early 376, which means that the order for his death could not have been given by Valentinian, who had died in November of 375.[33] This is not surprising; Theodosius the Elder had faithfully served that emperor in a number of independent commands and it would be odd for even the fiery tempered Valentinian to decide that such a loyal servant was now a threat. Instead, Theodosius seems to have fallen victim to the political chaos that ensued from Valentinian's sudden death.[34]

The most likely architect of his death was the Master of Infantry (*magister peditum*) Merobaudes. Immediately after Valentinian's death, high ranking officers in the emperor's expeditionary army summoned Merobaudes, who with the support of Flavius Equitius, the military commander of Illyricum (*comes et magister militum per Illyricum*), and Petronius Probus, the Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum, Italy and Africa, took charge of the political situation by bringing Gratian's infant half-brother Valentinian II before the troops to be acclaimed emperor. Our sources are divided on why Merobaudes did this. Zosimus paints his actions as a military necessity – with Gratian at Trier and Valens in the east "the barbarians beyond the Danube might attack while the West lacked an emperor". Ammianus on the other hand presents Merobaudes as a protector of the dynasty who moved to forestall the potential for revolt among the fickle Gallic legions "which were not always of devoted loyalty to legitimate emperors and regarded themselves as arbiters of the imperial power."[35] It's hard to know what Merobaudes' exact motivations were. The most politically persuasive argument would be that the wily Frank felt that the formal addition of another son of Valentinian would enhance the dynasty's position in the west. This of course would not only preserve but actually enhance his own position, especially as the perceived guardian of Valentinian II. Whatever the case he, and not Gratian, was the real power in western politics at the time of Theodosius the Elder's death. Given he not only raised Valentinian II to power, but also at the same time surreptitiously moved a key rival, the popular general Sebastianus to a distant post, Merobaudes had a clear agenda.[36]

Theodosius the Elder's death clearly suited Merobaudes' agenda and at the very least he allowed it to happen although it is far more likely that he was the prime mover.[37] As the aftermath of Valentinian's death proved, Gratian had very little control over events and was not strong enough to challenge Merobaudes. He may have even been content to be guided by his father's

general. Likewise, Valens, who some have suggested was behind Theodosius' death did not have the political reach, or even the time, to orchestrate such a dramatic intervention into western politics.[38] A number of sources suggest that Theodosius the Elder lost his life due to the envy of others. They can only be referring to Merobaudes and his circle of civilian and military supporters, who were the ones who had the most to fear from the powerful general.[39]

We have no indication as to what Theodosius the Elder planned to do in the wake of Valentinian's death. Crucially, there is no evidence that Theodosius attempted to usurp power for himself. He had been very loyal to Valentinian I and we can only assume he would remain loyal to his dynastic successors. Additionally, it would be remarkable that any such attempt to seize power would be lost from our view. Even if we assume that our pro-Theodosian sources are simply politic in not mentioning the attempt – it is far more likely that they would seek to retroactively justify the move rather than condemn it to silence.[40] What is possible, however, is that Theodosius the Elder did not support Merobaudes' elevation of Valentinian II, instead preferring to stay loyal to Gratian alone. Given this situation, Merobaudes would naturally seek to act directly against Theodosius the Elder or simply allow others to do the job for him.[41] Also, once Gratian himself had accepted Valentinian II, Merobaudes would have no reason to stand in the way of the almost immediate rehabilitation that occurred of the dead general's family.

In absolving Gratian of involvement in the execution of Theodosius the Elder we have removed the key impediment to his acceptance of Theodosius as an imperial partner. Clearly there was no great enmity between Gratian and Theodosius, and even if the emperor viewed him as a potential rival, he had felt comfortable enough to allow Theodosius to resume his military career as early as 377. Of course, for this to happen Merobaudes and the surviving conspirators, who were still dominant at Gratian's court when Theodosius returned, would also have to believe that he was no threat to them. We cannot completely rule out the idea that both Merobuades and Theodosius simply came to an uneasy truce with the former accepting that Theodosius was an asset to the regime and no threat to him or the new emperors and the latter accepting that he was in no position to challenge Merobaudes' power let alone seek revenge for the death of his father.

It is also likely that Theodosius believed that those directly responsible for his father's death had already been brought to justice.[42] As to their identity, it can be no coincidence that following the death of Valentinian I and Theodosius the Elder there was a significant purge of mainly Pannonian officials, including the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul Maximinus, Flavius Simplicius the former *vicarius* of Rome (*vicarius urbis Romae*) and his successor Doryphorianus.[43] The reason for this purge is unknown, but Maximinus at least had made himself extremely unpopular due to his role in the infamous trials held by Valentinian I that condemned a number of prominent Roman senators.[44] It is not unreasonable to assume that Theodosius believed this group were

directly responsible for the death of his father. Indeed, Jerome goes as far as to name Maximinus as involved in the plot.[45]

We will never know if Theodosius suspected the involvement of others, as to our knowledge he never sought vengeance against anyone for the death of his father. Petronius Probus was able to safely seek refuge in the territory of Theodosius when he fled there with Valentinian II in 388 and Pacatus felt secure enough to speak favourably of Merobaudes in a panegyric delivered after the general's untimely death at the hands of Maximus.[46] Here we see the highly pragmatic approach Theodosius often took towards those who would otherwise be considered his enemies. Even potential vengeance for the death of his father took a backseat to his immediate political needs.

We are now free to try and understand the circumstances in which Theodosius went from a senior military commander for Gratian to his imperial partner. Two plausible possibilities present themselves. First is that Theodosius somehow 'seized power' and forced Gratian to acquiesce to his rule. Second, is that Gratian chose Theodosius as his imperial colleague. The first option is extremely unlikely as we have no evidence Theodosius ever unilaterally seized power as a usurper. As we have seen with his father, it would be incredible for such a 'usurpation' to have taken place with no mention in our source material. If that had been the case, our pro-Theodosian sources would have justified or even glorified his actions rather than hide them. Conversely, Zosimus would have taken great delight in adding this crime to the many he attributes to Theodosius during the course of his long reign.

The second option is therefore far more likely. Gratian had no choice but to appoint a soldier as eastern Augustus due to the dire situation on the Danubian frontier. However, there was an extremely small pool of realistic candidates available to choose from. The vast majority of candidates from Valens' court had been wiped out at Adrianople. The few refugees that had reached Gratian were simply unsuitable. Besides, given the tempestuous relationship he had experienced with his uncle, Gratian was unlikely to promote a creature of his regime.[47] In the west the most obvious candidates were the two most senior commanders in his army – Merobaudes and Theodosius. Merobaudes remained the dominant military figure at court but his Frankish origins disqualified him from the purple.[48] This left Theodosius as the only credible candidate.

Our sources, including those hostile to the future emperor, are all in agreement that he possessed the military competency that would be expected of an emperor in this crisis. A number directly mention it was this quality, and the empire's desperate need for a military saviour that informed Gratian's choice. For Sozomen, Theodosius "had acquired so much renown in war, that before he was raised to the imperial power, he was universally considered capable of guiding the reins of the empire" (trans. Hartranft). Theodoret says that only through the courage of Theodosius could the empire take on the invaders while the *Epitome De Caesaribus* declares that Theodosius was a "distinguished defender of the state". This theme is continued by Orosius, who claims that Theodosius was needed to save the state, and Zonaras, who

outright says that Theodosius was rewarded with the purple for the valour he displayed against the barbarians. Finally, the usually hostile Zosimus even admits that Theodosius was "an aggressive and skilled commander".[49]

It has been suggested that Theodosius' military ability and the scale of his victories once returning to active service have been over-estimated by the sources. Given the years of hard campaigning that Theodosius was forced to undertake after his accession this is not an unreasonable observation. But the fact remains that, once returning to active service, Theodosius had proved himself a steady commander who had a rare ability for the age: he could achieve success (however modest) against the empire's enemies.[50]

Despite the enthusiasm our sources show for his military prowess, it's important we don't over-estimate either Gratian or his senior advisors' enthusiasm to appoint Theodosius as eastern emperor. While the *Epitome De Caesaribus* says that Theodosius achieved power "with universal favour" (*cunctis faventibus*), both Theodoret and Zonaras claim that Gratian was hesitant to appoint Theodosius Augustus.[51] Such accounts may echo an important political truth: despite the small amount of viable candidates available to him, Gratian made his choice reluctantly.

Theodosius boasted a network of supporters who must have played an important role in having him recalled to military service and eventually elevated to the purple. Gratian's court contained a number of prominent members of the Theodosian gens, including Flavius Eucherius, Theodosius' uncle and Gratian's Count of the Sacred Largesses (*Comes Sacarum Largitionem*), and the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, Flavius Claudius Antonius – thought to be a relation by marriage.[52] It is also possible that Theodosius enjoyed support among prominent families from the Roman Senate.[53] While it is unknown whether Theodosius had any strong support among the leading eastern generals who made it to Gratian's court, he did have military supporters in the west. Magnus Maximus, who was later to seize power from Gratian, is thought to have had close ties to both Theodosius and his father. Another possible supporter is Maiorianus (maternal grandfather of the emperor Majorian). Given Theodosius the Elder's long and illustrious career, there would have been others in the western army who remained loyal to his memory.[54] Theodosius himself clearly believed he had been served well by those who had remained loyal to his family's cause – even at its lowest ebb. The *Epitome De Caesaribus* says that "he loved to reward citizens or those whom he knew through private companionship with honors, wealth, and other favours; he had especially esteemed the services of those toward himself and his father in hopeless adversity" (trans. Banchich). Likewise Ambrose mentions the loyalty of unnamed individuals "when Theodosius' fortune turned sour".[55]

We do not know just how much pressure these networks were able to exert on the emperor. It is of course possible that they went beyond simply advocating for Theodosius and instead 'cornered' an unwilling Gratian into his choice. Merobaudes again looms large here and he must have supported making Theodosius emperor. Perhaps, like Gratian, he believed that given the

crisis in the east Theodosius was the right choice, no matter how unpalatable that was? [56]

On the available evidence, we can come to no conclusion other than that Gratian freely appointed Theodosius to be emperor, even if he did so with no great enthusiasm. Gratian and his closest supporters no doubt would have preferred to keep the entire empire under his family's control.[57] That Theodosius had a son of his own must have also weighed on them. Perhaps Theodosius was viewed as a temporary fix to be one day discarded, or at worst as a controllable junior partner who could be discarded once he had solved the Gothic problem? The eastern army had been all but wiped out and Gratian must have viewed his own position and ability to dictate the course of imperial politics as unassailable. He would soon learn otherwise.

In many ways Theodosius was an accidental emperor, created by the crisis of Adrianople. However, from the first moments of his reign he was to prove again and again that he possessed limitless determination and the ability to navigate the most adverse of circumstances. On the 19th January 379 at Sirmium, Gratian formally invested Theodosius with the purple.[58] He was unaware that he had just signed a death warrant for his own dynasty.

Notes

1 Two references in the *Epit. Caes.* 47.3 and 48.19 are our only evidence for the birth date of Theodosius. Kienast (2004) 337 believes it is possible that Theodosius was born in 346. On Theodosius' Spanish birthplace see Zos. 4.24.4; *Cons. Const.* a.379; Hydatius 2.14; *Epit. Caes.* 48,1; Soc. 5.2; Soz. 7.2.1, Orosius 7.34.2. A.M. Canto (2006) has rejected Cauca in favour of Italica – the site given by Marcell. com. a.379 ("Theodosius Hispanus Italicae divi Traiani civitatis").

2 *Epit. Caes.* 48.1 states that "Theodosius . . . , traced his origin from the princeps Trajan, . . . ". He goes on to claim a physical similarity: ". . . many writings of the ancients and pictures inform us that Theodosius resembled Trajan in his manners and physique: thus, his stature was eminent, his limbs the same, likewise his hair and his mouth, except that his legs were somewhat weak for marching and his eyes were not as glowing (I am not sure whether he was as kind, or had as much of a beard, or walked with so dignified a gait)" (trans. Banchich). The regime obviously encouraged these portrayals as we find Themistius (Them. *Or.* 16.205a and 19.229c), in a speech delivered in Constantinople in 383 before the emperor himself, describing Trajan as Theodosius' "ancestor and forefather". Likewise, in a speech delivered in celebration of Honorius' fourth consulship, Claudian (*de IV cos.* 18–20) strongly links Theodosius the elder with the House of Trajan. This link is of course an invention. Later the historian Orosius (7.34) compares Theodosius to Trajan. These claims are highly suspicious. Sivan (1996) 200 rightly notes that "in terms of senatorial genealogy his nobility was no more than mediocre".

3 Matthews (1975) notes that there is simply not enough evidence to know whether the family were longstanding fixtures of a "landed Spanish aristocracy". It is of course possible that Theodosius received land for earlier service, presumably to the House of Constantine. That said, the strong focus on the emperor Theodosius' Spanish origins and the many recorded Spanish family members would suggest a longer standing family link to Spain.

4 Amm. 27.8.3 – We have no indication of just where Theodosius the Elder had earned his military stripes. It would be strange of Ammianus not to note his

presence if he was involved in Julian's Persian campaign. We must assume then he was active on any number of campaigns in the west. Demandt (1972) 82ff argues that Theodosius must have campaigned against the Franks with the emperor Valentinian sometime before the British campaign, as Valentinian and his imperial colleagues carried the title *Francicus* by 369. Recently, Colombo (2017) has offered a detailed reconstruction of Theodosius the Elder's activities against the Franks, as well as the reasons these activities were not mentioned by Ammianus. Nixon & Rodgers (1994) 517ff offer a detailed discussion of the problems in Pacatus' account of Theodosius the Elder's career (*Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).5.2). For a useful overview of the 'Great Conspiracy' see Tomlin (1974).

5 Amm. 28.3.1–9. Interestingly Rohrbacher (2002) 274 believes that Ammianus' flattery of Theodosius the Elder derives solely from the fact that Ammianus was writing under the reign of Theodosius. He argues that there are a number of subtle 'jabs' at Theodosius the Elder in Ammianus' text, suggesting he was not as supportive of the either of the Theodosii as one would first think.

6 Zos. 4.35.3 confirms the emperor's presence on this campaign by stating that Maximus campaigned with Theodosius the Elder. *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).8.3 claims that Theodosius shared his father's campaign including "winters spent under campus . . . and the fiercest battles on land and sea". These sea battles could relate to the British campaign – see Nixon & Rodgers (1994) 517. See also, Claudian *de III Cos.* 50ff and *de IV Cos.* 18ff.

7 Amm. 28.3.8.

8 Amm. 28.5.15 – also see *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).5.2.

9 Firmus: Amm. 29.4.5. and *CIL* 8,5338. On the campaign against the Sarmatians see *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).5.2.

10 Amm. 29.6.15 and Zos. 4.16. Given this was a fairly high-profile command, we must assume he had proved himself in some military capacity. Campaigning with his father after Britain would fit this narrative. On a possible Sarmatian victory by Theodosius the Elder see *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).5.2. In addition, Zos. 4.16.3 notes that the expeditionary force for Africa was assembled in Pannonia and Moesia. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Theodosius the Elder campaigned against the Sarmatians before collecting his troops for Africa. At the very least it is likely he was in the area for the latter task – see Demandt (1972) 94.

11 Amm.29.5.5ff. Ammianus' admiration for Theodosius is exceedingly apparent at 29.5.4. Additional references to the campaign can be found at Orosius 7.33.6 Symm. *Or.* 6.4; *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).5.2; Claudian *de bello Gild.* 330ff; *de III Cos.* 52ff and *de IV Cos.* 24ff.

12 *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).1–3 alludes to Theodosius' early military success. "For that past military reputation of yours, which you acquired through so many trials and labours, is not to be ascribed to Fortune." As McLynn (2005) 89 notes, we do not know if Theodosius met his wife in Spain or if it was a pre-arranged match. On Flaccilla's Spanish origins, see Claudian *Laus Serenae* 63–69. On the birth of Arcadius, see Soc. 6.23.7. Around the same time Theodosius and Flaccilla also had a daughter – Pulcheria – who was to die shortly before her mother in 385 – see *PLRE* 1, Pulcheria for references.

13 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).9.1.

14 See Lenski (2002) 167ff for Valens' activities in the east.

15 Curran (1998) 83–86 and 99.

16 Lenski (2002) 116–137.

17 Amm.31.7–31.9. Lenski (2002) 356–358 notes the poor relationship between Gratian and his uncle that tempered the support Gratian was willing to provide.

18 Amm. 31.5.11–17 marks it as the worst since Cannae. Them. *Or.*16.206d says that "whole armies disappeared like a shadow". See also a similar comment at

*Or.*14.181a. On Valens' conduct of the campaign and the battle itself see Nicasie (1998) 233–256 and Lenski (2002) 355–367.

19 Ammianus (31.13.18) notes that Valens lost two thirds of his army at Adrianople including at least 35 tribunes (31.14.18) and both *magistri militum*. We do not know exactly how many troops Valens actually had at Adrianople – modern estimates vary from somewhere around 15,000–20,000 (Heather 1991, 147 and Austin 1972, 82) right up to 40,000 – most prominently, see Hoffmann (1969) 444, who estimates around 30–40,000, as well as Williams & Friell (1994) – 25,000–30,000 and Lenski (2002) 339, who follows Hoffmann. As Nicasie (1998) 246 notes, the Gothic army, which was at a minimum 10,000, was not big enough for Valens to reconsider committing to battle – so he himself must have led a sizeable force. As for the quality of Valens' army, it was most likely gathered from both praesential field army and the field army of Thrace. Hoffmann (1969) 449–457 lists 16 units he believes were completely wiped out – the vast majority of these being high quality *comitatenses*. Even if estimates of the losses are on the high side, there is no doubt that Adrianople was a devastating blow to Rome's military strength – one Theodosius was to fight against for his whole reign.

20 Lenski (2002) 91–92. For the sources on the death of Valentinianus Galates see 91, fn. 146.

21 The most obvious candidates to rise to the purple were the *viri illustres* Traianus (*PLRE* 1, Traianus 2) and Sebastianus (*PLRE* 1, Sebastianus 2). Additionally, Flavius Arinthaeus (*PLRE* 1, Flavius Arinthaeus), who had previously served as Master of Infantry and had received a consulship, had died prior to the battle.

22 Errington (1996a) 450–451 and Lenski (2002) 339 catalogue the losses among the military leadership of the east. Victor: *PLRE* 1, Victor 4.

23 Amm 31.13.19.

24 Zos. 4.24.3. It is thought that Gratian was at Castra Martis (Kula) or Sirmium when he heard the news brought by Victor, who had escaped the battle.

25 Zos. 4.24.4.

26 Errington (2006) 20–21 and 26.

27 While Errington (1996a) 452 admits that "the depth of the crisis" ruled out sending Valentinian II eastwards to set up a puppet regime, Vanderspoel (1995) 189 argues that Valentinian II could have been sent eastwards to deal with the crisis and rule, with the assistance of older trusted advisors. This view does not take into account the army's desire to be led by a warrior. As McEvoy (2013) 79–80 notes, making a mere child emperor would have represented a major shift in imperial policy.

28 Theod. *HE*. 5.5–6.

29 For another truncated account of Theodosius' return from obscurity, see *Pan. Lat* 2 (12).10.2.

30 Theod. *HE* 5.5–6; *Epit. Caes.* 48.1; Zonaras 13.17 all explicitly note that Theodosius was recalled after the Gothic incursions – see also Errington (1996a) 439–440. Treadgold (2005) 783ff however argues that Theodosius could have made the journey in time. His case is unconvincing as it requires immediate action at all times from all parties involved as soon as Gratian heard about Valens' death. It also relies on a trouble-free journey for both the messenger and Theodosius himself. Blanco-Perez (2013) 150 argues along similar lines.

31 Soc. 5.2; Soz. 7.2. Them. *Or.* 14.182c.

32 *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).10.2 and Them *Or.* 14.263; 15.284 – see Sivan (1996) 198–199 for a detailed discussion. Errington (1996a) 449 argues that the position was probably *magister equitum*.

33 Jerome, *Chron*. 248c; Errington (1996a) 444.

34 Valentinian I died at Brigetio on 17th November while on campaign against the Quadi. For a comprehensive analysis of the political crisis that followed the death

of Valentinian I, see Kelly (2013). There is voluminous scholarship on the mysterious death of Theodosius the Elder. Demandt (1969) 598–626 remains the most detailed discussion. See also Naude (1987) 388–399. Views are varied as to who was responsible. Here I most closely follow Errington (1996a) with some divergences. See also Sivan (1996) 202, fn. 31.

35 Zos 4.19.1; Amm. 30.10.1–4. Both Valens and Gratian reacted negatively to the elevation of Valentinian II – but they did eventually ratify the army's choice. See Soc. 4.31 and Eunap. frag.42 = *Exc. De Leg. Gent* 6.

36 Amm. 30.10.3

37 Amm. 30.10.3. Notably Rodgers (1981) 8, argues that Merobaudes was not responsible for the death of Theodosius the Elder. Jerome, *chron*. 376 notes that Theodosius' death was one among many, which suggests that Merobaudes was 'clearing the decks' to ensure his own supremacy as an unofficial guardian of the new western emperors.

38 Much of the argument for Valens' involvement in the death of Theodosius the Elder stems from an series of treason trials held by Valens in 372 (Amm. 29.1.29; Zos. 4.13.3; Soc. 4.19 and Soz. 6.35.4–6 *Epit. Caes.* 48 and Philostorgius 9.15). This incident was sparked when (supposedly) a group of imperial officials consulted a diviner to find out the name of Valens' successor. This diviner had used a tripod on a metal plate engraved with the Greek alphabet and in the process had spelled out 'THEOD' – which everyone at the time thought was an imperial notary named Theodorus (*PLRE* 1, Theodorus 13) who was subsequently executed. Treadgold (2005) argues vigorously that Valens had Theodosius killed due to his ongoing fears that his position would be usurped by someone who's name began with 'Theod'. This position is also accepted by Maraval (2009) 30–34. Williams and Friell (1994) 24 are more circumspect, merely conceding that Valens' fears could have been stoked by the enemies of Theodosius for their own. I find this interpretation highly improbable. Valens was not prepared to take the west for himself as senior Augustus – it would be highly unusual for his only foray to be an execution of a general who had never served him, or indeed served in the east at all. This position would also require a conspiracy between the eastern emperor and western figures such as Maximinus – who Treadgold (2005) 779 believes was the actual vehicle for the killing. In addition, why would Theodosius the Elder meekly submit to orders (Orosius 7.33.7) from the eastern emperor – whom he had never served? The ancient evidence Treadgold relies on is also brittle. Philostorgius 9.15 simply repeats later gossip and Treadgold is forced to find a copyist error in Socrates that changes one victim of the affair, 'Theodosiolus' to Theodosius – leaving aside the fact that it would be remarkable for Socrates to give no further explanation about the murder of the emperor's father. A direct claim in Jordanes *Rom*. 312 is more convincing but this source is far removed from events. If Valens did indeed have Theodosius murdered it is odd that Ammianus did not mention it.

39 Orosius 7.33.7. Similar claims are made about Theodosius' forced exile. Amb. *de ob. Theod*. 53 says that the same men who threatened his father also threatened the son. Theod. *HE* 5.5.1 talks about Theodosius' exile being driven by the envy of others.

40 It is for this reason that I cannot agree with Vanderspoel (1995) 188, who claims that "Any suggestion that the elder Theodosius was the victim of false accusations is invalid. The *conspiration du silence* of the sources guarantees his guilt, on charges that must have included treason."

41 This scenario would help explain why the family of Theodosius were rehabilitated so quickly by Gratian.

42 Errington (1996a) 445–446.

43 Amm. 28.1.

44 Philostorgius 9.16 claims that Gratian punished some of those responsible.

45 See Errington (1996a) 446, fn. 52 for a discussion about this text. Maximinus' brother-in-law, Valentinus (*PLRE* 1, Valentinus 5), a British rebel, was brought to justice by Theodosius the elder. Given his son was serving in Britain when this occurred, he would have been aware of this. Theodosius may have believed that the death of his father was 'payback' for this episode – see Rodgers (1981) 83.
46 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).28.4.; Errington (1996a) 445.
47 On the military survivors of the eastern regime see Errington (1996a) 451 and Sivan (1996) 208ff. On Gratian's relationship with Valens see Lenski (2002) 336–338 and 356–367.
48 For the career of Merobaudes see *PLRE* 1, Flavius Merobaudes 2.
49 Soz. 7.2.1 (echoed by a very similar account in Soc. 5.2); Theod. *HE* 5.5; Orosius 7.34.2; and Zos. 4.24.4. See also Zonaras 13.17 and *Chron. Gall. a.452*.
50 Treadgold (2005) 787 Errington (1996a) 452, fn. 83. McLynn (2005) 90, also rightly cautions against overemphasising Theodosius' military support given his modest military achievements.
51 *Epit. Caes*. 47.3; Theod. HE. 5.5; Zonaras 13.17.
52 Flavius Eucherius: *Epit. Caes*. 48.18 and Them. *Or*. 16.203d and *PLRE* 1, Flavius Eucherius 2. Flavius Claudius Antonius: Symm *Ep*. 1.90 and *PLRE* 1, Flavius Claudius Antonius.
53 Errington (1996a) 448ff. Senatorial support: It is possible that Olybrius, the Praetorian Prefect for Illyricum, was at Sirmium with Gratian at the time he was making his choice about the new eastern emperor (Auson. *Gratiarum Actio* 12.55).
54 Military supporters in the west: Sivan (1996) 209 and Maraval (2009) 37–38. Treadgold (2005) argues that it is unlikely that Theodosius had much support among the remaining eastern military establishment. Maiorianus: As suggested by McLynn (2005) 93, he was probably a *comes Illyrici* or *dux Valeriae* under Gratian.
55 *Epit. Caes*. 48.9 and Amb. *de ob. Theod*. 33.
56 Merobaudes may have seen Theodosius' elevation as a useful way to remove a rival for his own power in the west.
57 The absence of any mention of Theodosius in the *gratiarum actio* delivered by Ausonius in mid-379 may speak to this attitude – see Sivan (1996) 205–206.
58 *Cons. Const*. a.379.1.

2 Meeting the crisis

The campaigns of 379–382

Upon being declared emperor, Theodosius faced an immediate crisis that required an aggressive response. The collapse of the Danubian Frontier had exposed the entire eastern diocese of Thrace as well as the eastern reaches of the western prefecture of Illyricum (including Pannonia, Dacia and Macedonia) to the invaders. Gothic bands would even roam further afield, with one reaching Constantinople, where they were only deterred by the city's walls and some hastily raised troops.[1] With riots breaking out amongst Goths living and serving in the east, tensions were extremely high. The Master of Soldiers for the East (*per orientem*), Julius, was so concerned that he orchestrated a massacre of Gothic troops serving in eastern regions of the empire.[2] In the conflict zone itself, Roman authority was minimal and the new emperor had few to no troops available to fulfil his core duty to protect the empire's citizens.[3] His new subjects however had high expectations of what he could achieve. We see these in a speech delivered by Themistius in the first months of Theodosius' reign:

> You have appeared for us as one man in place of all others, we look to you in place of all others – Dacians Thracians, Illyrians, men at arms and the rest of our armament all of which vanished away quicker than a shadow . . . it is because of the hopes left to us in you that we have taken a stand, that we draw breath and believe that you shall now check the impetus of success for the Scythians and quench the conflagration that devours all things, which neither the Haemus could halt nor the boundaries of Thrace or Illyria. . . .[4]
>
> (trans. Heather & Moncur)

As the new eastern emperor, we would expect Theodosius to have immediately travelled to Constantinople. However, driven by the unique circumstances that catapulted him to power in the first place, by June 379 Theodosius had set up his court in Thessalonica, which was geographically well-suited to oversee military operations against the Goths.[5] He would remain there until November

380, when he could finally move to Constantinople. Although this period is famously difficult to reconstruct, we have enough evidence to trace the general fortunes of the war and the way Theodosius went about his difficult task.[6]

Having raised Theodosius to power, Gratian almost immediately handed overall command of the war to him while he himself headed west to deal with threats to his own territory. Part of this arrangement was the temporary transfer of the Prefecture of Illyricum, traditionally the responsibility of the western emperor, to Theodosius' domain on the 1 September 379. Such a concession reveals the scale of the Gothic incursion and the threat Gratian believed it represented to his own sphere of influence.[7] Gratian would play no further personal role in the conflict although he seems to have provided significant material support to the eastern war effort, including forces led by western generals. With Gratian's departure Theodosius was left to quickly put together a makeshift regime and set about reconstructing a shattered empire.

One of the most urgent tasks facing Theodosius was the need to rebuild the eastern army. Upon his accession, Theodosius inherited a severely depleted force. The defeat at Adrianople had not only robbed the east of anywhere between 10,000–40,000 men but had also cost the army the cream of its tactical and strategic leadership.[8] Just as damaging was the demoralization that had set in to what remained of the eastern army after Valens' defeat. Theodosius not only had to restore the strength of his army, he had to make them believe that they could win again. He began by bringing in units from other areas of the empire, including Syria and Egypt.[9] He also undertook a massive recruitment drive to make up numbers. This task was daunting as even under normal circumstances citizens were increasingly unwilling to undertake military service. Even the mainstay of imperial recruitment, the sons of veterans, were attempting to avoid military service via careers in the civil service. Theodosius didn't have the luxury of developing a long-term solution to this problem and in 380 was forced to legislate twice within two months to stop the sons of veterans avoiding the Gothic war.[10] According to Libanius, Theodosius also desperately turned to pressing farmers into service, saying that "those who have spent their lives in arms are gone, we resort to our peasantry". Likewise, Themistius talks of Theodosius enrolling farmers and miners into his army.[11] It wasn't just the quantity of recruits that was a problem for Theodosius: quality was often lacking. Theodosius issued laws banning slaves and those from 'unsuitable professions' (such as breadmakers and cooks) from being offered up as recruits.[12] He was however forced to take other, less than optimal recruits. In the past, soldiers who had mutilated themselves to avoid service were burnt alive. Now however, faced with a desperate need for recruits to stem the Gothic tide, Theodosius accepted those who had amputated fingers to avoid service – although he decreed that two mutilated recruits would be needed to replace one 'normal' recruit.[13]

Citizens weren't the only source of new recruits. Despite the barbarian invasions, Theodosius took the same route as many of his predecessors by welcoming barbarians into the army. Zosimus notes that he enrolled barbarians

from beyond the Danube with at least some of these recruits sent to serve in Egypt.[14] It's extremely difficult to know just how many barbarians were recruited in the early days of his reign as the Roman army already contained many barbarian recruits when Theodosius came to power. Thus we cannot assume that every mention of barbarians in our sources, or even more specifically of Gothic recruits, are a product of Theodosius' efforts. In many ways, despite recruiting from the very people who threatened Rome, Theodosius was left with no choice if he was to rebuild his army. Many have pointed the finger at Theodosius for 'barbarizing' the Roman army, but as we will see later, Theodosius merely took a well-established practice and accelerated it.

Recruitment wasn't the only problem facing Theodosius in 379. For many of his raw recruits, desertion was preferable to facing the victors of Adrianople, while troops of barbarian origin began to reconsider their loyalties. Between July 379 and February 383, Theodosius and his imperial colleagues in the west issued a raft of laws aimed at ending the increasing problem of desertion. From these laws we learn that both new recruits and serving soldiers were deserting.[15] The bulk of this legislation is aimed at the support network deserters used to evade their service. Owners of large estates are singled out repeatedly, suggesting that these were a favoured refuge for deserters. Punishments were harsh, reflecting the pressures of the time. Estate stewards (*actores*) could expect to be burnt alive if caught harbouring deserters, while those of higher rank could expect severe financial punishments.[16] Circumstances had clearly become more desperate than ever before. In 365 Valentinian and Valens had legislated that lower class citizens harbouring deserters would be sent to the mines, while those of higher social status would be fined half their property. By 383, punishments had become far more demonstrable. Beatings, the mines, or even exile were delivered to the lower classes, while citizens exempted from corporal punishment were required to deliver ten recruits or 50 pounds of silver.[17] Theodosius also attempted to shift the financial burden of desertion back onto individual communities by legislating that tax collectors (*temonarii*) would be responsible for replacing any new recruits who deserted within their first year of service.[18]

Theodosius also tried the carrot as well as the stick. Rewards were offered to those who turned in deserters. Slaves could expect freedom; citizens exemption from taxation. Tax collectors who handed in deserters could be relieved of their heavy burden for two years.[19] As for the penalties meted out to the deserters themselves – they are almost an afterthought. In the raft of laws issued between 379–383 there are only two mentions of deserters being punished by death. In fact, if deserters were prepared to give themselves up voluntarily they would be spared punishment.[20] Given the extreme pressure the eastern army was under after Adrianople, it is not surprising that Theodosius sought to stamp out the practice of desertion without killing large numbers of deserters. His army could simply not afford the self-inflicted casualties. Overall, despite the problems he faced, Theodosius reacted well to the dire military situation. In a short period of time he managed to cobble

together an army with which he could start the long process of trying to expel the barbarian interlopers that remained on Roman territory and re-establishing the territorial integrity of the Danubian frontier.

The confused narrative our sources present for the first years of campaigning reflects the fragmentary nature of the war itself. Even if Theodosius was in a position to immediately launch a large-scale counter attack, his enemies had dispersed across a number of provinces (see Map 2). In the second half of 379 Theodosius, operating from Thessalonica, won some initial (although limited) victories, probably in the province of Pannonia. The most prominent success of the year was earned by Theodosius' Gothic Master of Soldiers Modares, who achieved a victory against the Goths in Thrace that was significant enough for Zosimus to make the exaggerated claim that as a result the area was completely cleared of barbarians. Further west, Gratian's generals may have also achieved some minor successes. Other supposed victories against the Alans and Huns are harder to substantiate.[21] By 380, the main theatre of conflict moved both south and west into Macedonia and Pannonia, perhaps as a result of Modares' victories in the previous year.

The new year proved to be a mixed one for Rome. Gothic forces, probably the Tervingi led by Fritigern, roamed as far as Macedonia, where they delivered a serious defeat to Theodosius and his fragile new army, with the emperor barely escaping with his own life. Zosimus uses this occasion to criticise the emperor's practice of recruiting barbarians, stating that the defeat, and Theodosius' near-death, was a direct result of the treachery of barbarians he had just recruited into his army.[22] Further west in Pannonia, a western army faced the Greuthungi led by Alatheus and Saphrax.[23] This campaign may have been concluded with a poorly recorded agreement whereby some of this group were settled in Pannonia and Upper Moesia. There is fierce debate about this agreement, particularly whether it stemmed from a Roman victory or defeat and perhaps more importantly whether its terms created a new precedent in how the empire negotiated with barbarian peoples.[24]

Other activities are also recorded. Theodosius and Gratian may have personally met at Sirmium and then combined forces for joint operations against the dispersed Goths. Any further campaigning conducted by Theodosius personally could not have been extensive as sometime in mid-to-late 380 he was struck down by a serious illness from which he almost died. His generals no doubt continued to campaign on his behalf.[25] Despite these chaotic circumstances, the military situation at the end of 380 was more stable than it had previously been. Victories are recorded for both Theodosius and Gratian, although it's unclear exactly where and when they occurred. Better evidence for this newfound stability is that by November 380 Theodosius no longer felt obliged to stay in the war zone and moved his court from Thessalonica to Constantinople.[26]

Events between Theodosius' entry into Constantinople and the formal conclusion of hostilities in October of 382 are also clouded. Apart from a reported success against a group of Skiri and Huns, Theodosius does not

seem to have won any other major victories. The most detailed information we possess is for the activities of the western generals Bauto and Arbogast, who continued to campaign in Macedonia and Thessaly.[27] Instead our sources focus on what can be generously termed a publicity stunt, with the arrival early in 381 of the aged Gothic leader (*iudex*) Athanaric to Constantinople seeking asylum. Athanaric, a leader of the Tervingi, had previously been an implacable enemy of Rome. In 369 he had famously signed a peace treaty in the middle of the Danube after vowing never to set foot on Roman territory.[28] However, his power was greatly diminished after defeats at the hands of the Huns and many of his followers transferred their loyalty to Fritigern and attempted to gain entry to the empire in 376. Athanaric, with only a small group of his original followers, withdrew into the Carpathian Mountains to wait out the storm. While Athanaric's submission to Theodosius had no real practical effect on the war (he would die only weeks after entering Constantinople), the whole affair was of huge symbolic significance and marks a significant shift in attitude by Theodosius as to how he wished to conclude the war.[29] Although Athanaric was a much diminished figure, Theodosius heaped honours on him when he entered the city and then after his untimely death held a lavish funeral celebration for him.

These efforts were not because Athanaric himself was important to Theodosius' plans. Instead, they indicate that Theodosius no longer believed that he could drive every Gothic invader from Roman soil.[30] His ostentatious treatment of Athanaric was instead designed to signal to other Goths that the empire was now open to a negotiated end to the conflict. This policy shift can be found in a panegyric delivered by Themistius at Constantinople shortly after the death of Athanaric. In the speech, Theodosius is presented not just as a figure of authority but also a figure of trust.

> The very sight of you is enough to dispel all fear from the spirit. So even he who was among your enemies, long scorning your truce, and out of suspicion not daring to share your table readily, now approaches unarmed and without his sword, giving himself to be treated howsoever you wish, knowing that you will not want to be treat him as an enemy.

He urges other Goths to follow Athanaric's lead:

> And so those whom we have not conquered by arms, we attract voluntarily through faith in you and, as the magnetic stone gently draws iron to itself, so you drew on the Getic chieftain without effort and he comes to the Royal city as a willing supplicant to you, he who was once proud and haughty of spirit, whose father the great and mighty Constantine won over with a statue which even now stands at the rear of the Senate house.[31]
>
> (trans. Heather & Moncur)

Importantly, Theodosius is still presented as a victor who is allowing a supplicant to enter the empire, and elsewhere in the speech Themistius claims that Rome will still drive the invaders back over the Danube. But overall the speech acknowledges that the Goths are here to stay and the empire must find a way to deal with them.[32] This change in message is particularly stark when contrasted to the speech Themistius gave at Thessalonica just two years earlier. There he boldly portrayed Theodosius as ready to drive the Goths from the empire: victory would be inevitable.[33] Of course, this would never happen. We do not know exactly when Theodosius realised that such a victory over the Goths was impossible but it must have been relatively early in his reign. Given he was finally able to announce a peace settlement in October 382, active negotiations with Gothic leaders must have commenced at the latest in early 381. Such a change in policy would also serve to explain the scarcity of ongoing military activities and the absence of victory announcements between November 380 and the formal peace announcement of October 382.[34]

Even after the agreement was finalised, Theodosius remained aware that his shift from a policy of total victory to one of compromise and conciliation with an enemy still on Roman territory was not without political danger. In January 383 Themistius delivered an oration that lauded the many benefits that the agreement had delivered to the empire. But along with this praise he was careful to present Theodosius as having the foresight to embrace the best solution for Rome:

> [H]e was the first who dared entertain the notion that the power of the Romans did not now lie in weapons, nor in breastplates, spears and unnumbered manpower, but that there was need of some other power and provision, which, to those who rule in accordance with the will of god, comes silently from that source, which subdues all nations, turns all savagery to mildness and to which alone arms, bows, cavalry, the intransigence of the Scythians . . . yield.[35]
>
> (trans. Heather & Moncur)

The 'foedus' of 382

The agreement Theodosius reached with the Goths in 382 is perhaps the most controversial act of his reign. It has been viewed as a watershed moment in the relationship between Rome and its barbarian neighbours, an agreement that radically shifted power away from the empire and which would begin an ongoing policy of accommodation that led to the fall of the west. More recently this analysis has been rightly challenged by those who instead see the agreement as an incremental step (albeit one determined by circumstance) in the empire's evolving attitude towards its neighbours. Like much of this confused period, the agreement, including its negotiation and its terms, is poorly recorded. However, a close examination of the sources reveals an agreement that boasted traditional characteristics, but which also signalled a changing power reality for the empire.

Oddly, we have no explicit evidence as to which barbarian peoples the agreement applied to. The Gothic chiefs who had led their people over the Danube in the mid-370s have by this time disappeared from our sources. We have only one reference to an overall king of the Goths (*rex gothorum*), but it is very unlikely that such an individual actually existed. Given negotiations likely stretched between early 381 and October 382, it was likely a painstaking process of ongoing communication with multiple and dispersed leaders of the Gothic invaders. The agreement almost certainly included the bulk of the Tervingi who were originally led by Fritigern. It is possible however that it also encompassed elements of the Greuthungi and perhaps even the bands of Huns and the Alans that had joined the other invaders.

As for the agreement itself, it was not a formal treaty (*foedus*) between two equal partners like those that would subsequently be negotiated in the fifth century.[36] The bulk of the source material confirms that the agreement was reached from a position of Roman strength. The *Consularia Constantinopolitana* proclaims that the Goths as a people, king at the helm, surrendered to the might of Rome ("universa gens Gothorum cum rege suo"), while Themistius' talks of the arrogance of the Scythian laid low by Theodosius. Other sources also speak of the Goths as being subject to the empire.[37] The only real divergence comes from the later Gothic writer Jordanes. He anachronistically paints the agreement as one between equal partners, even claiming that such an arrangement actually went back to Constantine, and that Theodosius merely renewed the terms.[38] Even taking into account the pro-Roman bias in much of the contemporary source material, it is likely that there is truth in their uniformity. While the Goths had achieved a massive victory at Adrianople they had not been able to consolidate any permanent territorial gains within the empire. At best they were faced with a stalemate and could only gain the farming land, not to mention the peace and security they craved, without making a deal with the empire.

The agreement then was most likely a traditional *deditio*, whereby the affected barbarian invaders voluntarily submitted to the empire in return for resettlement on imperial land.[39] However, despite the traditional diplomatic form of the agreement, this arrangement was different to past *deditiones*, which had followed decisive Roman victories in barbarian territory.[40] Speaking in 384, Themistius subtly acknowledges this new reality, saying that "they (the barbarians) were captured by the virtue of the king and brought themselves in willingly even at the time when they were confident in their weapons". Later in the same speech he justifies this strange arrangement by saying the emperor's "counsel and intelligence alone held out unvanquished, with which you won a fairer victory than if you had shown yourself superior in arms" (trans. Heather & Moncur). [41] The truth was though that Theodosius had no choice but to make an agreement with the Goths, who were not only undefeated, but who still occupied large amounts of Roman territory. This changed power reality is best illustrated by comparing Theodosius' agreement with that made by Constantine in 332. The latter had crossed the Danube and

won a decisive victory over the Tervingi that allowed him to enforce an agreement that would hold for over three decades and provide Rome with large tribute payments and plentiful military recruits. Theodosius however, was dealing with an undefeated force 'squatting' on Roman territory and his agreement reflected this fact.[42]

Even the optics of the agreement show a change from past practice. Theodosius did not conduct the negotiations himself and instead sent his generals Saturninus and Richomeres as envoys. Perhaps more telling is that the emperor did not even leave his capital to formally complete the announcement. In 369 a weakened Valens had seen some propaganda value in travelling to the Danube to formalise his agreement with Athanaric on a boat in the middle of the river. Theodosius though felt it necessary to stay one-step removed from an agreement that on a number of levels exposed a growing weakness in the empire's position. Even if Gothic representatives participated in a formal ceremony of surrender in Constantinople, as is suggested by Themistius, this was at best a symbolic exercise.[43] Finally, also missing was a largescale proclamation of the victory on imperial coinage, again demonstrating some hesitation on the part of Theodosius to embrace the agreement too closely.[44]

The actual terms of the agreement of 382 remain obscure. What information we do have is invariably coloured by our sources, or simply so broad as to be open to multiple interpretations. That said, the centrepiece of the agreement is clear – Theodosius agreed to settle at least a section of the Goths within the borders of the empire, most probably along the Danube in Lower Moesia and other areas of the Diocese of Thrace.[45] Here the Goths received land to farm (Pacatus refer to the Goths as 'farmers'), thus achieving something they had wanted way back in 376 when they had initially asked to enter the empire.[46] In return they were required to provide recruits for the army, with our sources variously talking of "the Goths being made allies of Rome", "serving the empire as soldiers, enrolling in the same ranks and sharing military ventures" and being "admitted into service to supply soldiers for your (Theodosius') camps."[47] The terms under which this service was carried out are controversial, and it's an issue we'll continue to encounter as we trace Theodosius' reign and look more closely at the way he employed barbarian troops on his later western campaigns. Famously, Jordanes claims that under the agreement 20,000 Gothic soldiers promised to fight as so called federate troops (*foederati*) led by their own tribal chieftains.[48] Again, Jordanes is retrospectively transporting a later reality onto an earlier period. Instead, the bulk of the evidence strongly suggests that Theodosius integrated these new recruits into the traditional structure of his army. A number of new units were formed, with at least two carrying the names of barbarian tribes, the Visi and the Tervingi, and appearing in the Notitia Dignitatum as *auxilia palatina*. It is likely that other units listed in the Notitia, whose nomenclature doesn't suggest a barbarian character, were also partly or wholly formed from Goths recruited under the 382 agreement. Other recruits were no doubt used

to bolster the ranks of existing units.[49] We see hints of this new infusion of troops in Zosimus' oft cited account of the Roman commander Gerontius facing down an unnamed but arrogant unit of barbarians near the city of Tomi in Scythia.[50] If this is the case, such units were high in the emperor's esteem, with Zosimus vividly describing gifts of golden torques (*dona*) and additional supplies (*annona*) they received. The soldiers in this particular unit were chosen by Theodosius for their military prowess, which reflects the large pool of new recruits he now had access to under the 382 agreement.

The agreement of 382 receives predictably good press in our contemporary sources. Themistius forgets his past bellicose rhetoric to emphasise that Theodosius has conquered through kindness and brought back the barren lands of Thrace to life, where the empire's former enemies now plough the fields. Likewise, Pacatus emphasises that the agreement removed a dangerous enemy from Rome's borders and replaced them with soldiers who would fight for the empire's security.[51] Modern commentators are nowhere near as accommodating and an influential school of thought argues that even if this agreement didn't allow the Goths to live as a 'state within a state' it did give them the freedom to live in a semi-autonomous fashion within the empire under their own laws and leaders. In short, the agreement formed a prototype which would eventually develop into a standard practice during the fifth century.[52] While this argument is overstated, contemporary evidence hints at some unique aspects of the agreement. Speaking in 383, Themistius expresses the hope that the Goths will in the future undertake public duties (presumably this would include paying taxes) and be ruled by Governors – just like other inhabitants of the empire. This suggests that some level of autonomy had been granted to the Gothic settlers, although there must have been some level of imperial administration in the territory in question. It also suggests that the Goths were given an initial immunity from taxation while they settled into their new lands and waited for their first harvests to succeed. Theodosius no doubt had learnt from the punitive actions of Valens' officials and saw the benefits in applying a gentler approach.[53]

So how should we describe the legal status of the Goths under the 382 agreement? Overall, Themistius' carefully worded hopes do not provide conclusive evidence that the Goths were allowed to live in total freedom under their own laws, responsible only to their own tribal leaders.[54] Although subject to some level of imperial control, the settled Goths were not mere tenant farmers (*coloni*). Instead the most fitting description would be that they were a privileged category of farmer-soldiers (*laeti*), who unlike their predecessors were in a much stronger position due to having only symbolically surrendered to the empire rather than actually suffering a major defeat in the field.[55]

Just as important as the formal 'legal' structure of the agreement is the way in which Theodosius continued to personally manage the empire's relationship with the new settlers. Unlike Constantine, who had come to an agreement with leaders outside of the empire, Theodosius was conscious of the delicate position he found himself in and worked hard to forge personal bonds with selected

tribal leaders. Most prominently, the emperor held regular banquets to which Gothic leaders were invited and feted. Theodosius clearly understood the importance of his relationships and in the unique circumstances in which he had accommodated a significant number of Goths. He could not simply rely on the terms of the original agreement and because he was not in a position to militarily expel the settled Goths, he needed to carefully manage the relationship to ensure that obligations such as military service were rendered faithfully. Zosimus reveals the delicate nature of this relationship when he notes that there were disagreements among Gothic leaders as to whether they should stay true to the oaths they had sworn to Rome.[56]

In the short term the agreement of 382 was a political triumph that allowed Theodosius to argue that he had completed the task that brought him to the throne. The empire was now seemingly at peace and the Danubian *limes* had been re-sealed. In 386 the agreement passed its first real test with flying colours when a large group of Greuthungi from outside the empire sought to cross the Danube into Roman territory. With the help of barbarians serving Rome, probably as result of the 382 agreement, Theodosius' forces inflicted a devasting defeat on the would-be invaders, for which the emperor celebrated a triumph in Constantinople.[57] Not only had Rome's military border held but the barbarians settled along the Danube had chosen to remain loyal to the empire over any ties they may have felt for their kinsmen from beyond the Danube. As we shall see, with the immediate crisis solved, Theodosius was now free to set his sights beyond mere survival and focus on building a stable regime in the east. The agreement would also prove vital in providing him with the military muscle he needed to survive two brutal civil wars. In the longer term however, it held great dangers for the empire that would not emerge until Theodosius had died.

While the agreement of 382 was on the surface a traditional *deditio* and not a *foedus* negotiated between two equal partners the empire had never before been in such a weak position. Rome had not defeated the Goths, who still remained on imperial soil and Theodosius was forced to make concessions his imperial predecessors would never have agreed to. The settled Goths had more autonomy and lighter burdens than any barbarians who had been settled in the empire before them. While a militarily competent, and charismatic, emperor sat on the throne in Constantinople they could be contained. In the future however, when Rome was ruled by Theodosius' much weaker sons, their father's agreement presented far more serious problems.

Notes

1 Amm. 31.15–16.
2 Amm. 31.16.8.
3 Burns (1994) 44ff.
4 Them. *Or.* 181a–b.
5 See Appendix 2 for a full discussion of Theodosius' relationship with Constantinople.

6 Even Jones (1964) 156 threw his hands up at the task of understanding this period. Our source material for the period is particularly unsatisfactory as (in the case of many of the church writers) they compress events into a few sentences or in the case of our main source Zosimus, offer a confused and fragmentary narrative – see Errington (1996b) 15ff. Useful narratives of the initial years of the campaign can be found in Errington (1996b); Heather (1991) 147–156; Burns (1994) 43–91; Kulikowski (2007) 150–153 and Maraval (2009) 49–52.
7 Soz. 7.4.1. See Errington (1996b) 22–27 for a detailed discussion of the much debated circumstances and length of this transfer. The Prefecture was likely returned to the west by 382 (Errington, 1996b, 26).
8 See Chapter 1, fn. 19 for the military cost of Adrianople.
9 Syria: Lib. *Or.* 24.16. Egypt: Zos. 4.31.1. This transfer included Arab Auxiliaries, perhaps led by Mavia, Them. *Or.* 34.20.
10 *CTh*. 7.22.9 "If any persons born of military stock should attach themselves to different office staffs, they shall be seized by force and dragged back. Veterans also shall know that their children whose innate strength reveals them to be fit for military duties must be presented for military service, or else they shall henceforth be subject to the toils of Our law." (May 14, 380) *CTh.* 7.22.10 – "It is Our will that the sons of veterans and of soldiers shall be associated with the armed imperial service, not only such sons who are performing imperial service in various office staffs but also those who are free for their own affairs. There shall be, therefore, no occasion of exemption" (July 8, 380) (trans. Pharr).
11 Lib. *Or*. 24.16. Them. *Or*. 14.181b–c who of course spins the situation saying "Already you make even farmers a terror to the barbarian, and the miners too, whom you command to neglect gold and dig for iron"; "And this army which has not tasted the life of luxury has now come together voluntarily, schooled to gain advantage from adversity" (trans. Norman).
12 The latter perhaps reflects the essential service these individuals played in food production.
13 Unsuitable soldiers: *CTh*. 7.13.8;11. Mutilated soldiers: *CTh*. 7.13.10. See also *CTh*. 7.13.9 handed down in April demanding that replacement troops be sourced from "suitable regions". It's worth noting that as late as 373 (*CTh*. 7.13.5) soldiers who had mutilated themselves to avoid service were burnt alive. Theodosius however, could not afford to be so cavalier with such a limited human resource.
14 Zos. 4.30.2–4.31.2 seems to suggest some stayed behind with Theodosius' army in Macedonia.
15 C*Th*. 7.18.4.2.
16 *CTh*. 7.18.2–8.
17 Valentinian and Valens: *CTh*. 7.18.1; Theodosius: *CTh.* 7.18.8.
18 *CTh*. 7.18.6.
19 *CTh*. 7.18.4 and 7.18.3.
20 *CTh*. 7.18.3.
21 Modares: Zos. 4.25. Heather (1991) 77–78 points out some of the problems with Zosimus' portrayal of Modares' victories during this period. Victories: The *Consularia Constantinopolitana* (a.379) notes a victory over Goths, Alans and Huns for this year. We cannot be sure whether this is referring to same successes Zosimus ascribes to Modares. It is thought that Symmachus (Symm. 1.95) announced the same victories to the Senate. As Heather (1991) 150 notes given the campaigning would go on for years these 'victories' cannot have been decisive.
22 Zos 4.31. This defeat is hinted at by Themistius – see Heather (1991) 152, fn. 77. Maraval (2009) 49 argues that Theodosius must have been facing elements of Fritigern's Tervingi.
23 Gratian's forces were probably led by the Count of military affairs (*comes rei militaris*) Vitalianus, Zos. 4.34.1–2 is extremely critical of Vitalianus.

24 Burns (1994) 60–63 offers a useful summary of some of the older scholarship on the issue. For more recent scholarship see Delaplace (2015) 91 and the very detailed analysis of Kovács (2016) 576–601. Notably, Heather (1991) 334ff believes the settlement did not happen.
25 We know very little regarding just who was active in the field during 380. We know Vitalianus (Zos. 4.34.1) campaigned on behalf of Gratian but as for who led Theodosius' forces we are blind.
26 Victories for both Augusti are recorded in the Consularia Constantinopolitana (a.380) – one of these at least could be Gratian's settlement with the Greuthungi. The same entry also details Theodosius' entry into Constantinople.
27 Zos. 4.33 and 4.34.6. See also Errington (1996b) 17–18 and Heather (1991) 155.
28 Amm. 27.5.8–9 and Them *Or.* 10.134a.
29 Defeat by the Huns: Amm. 31.3.4–8 and 4.13. Entry into Constantinople: Them. *Or.* 15.190d ff; Soc. 5.10; Jordanes *Get.* 142ff (this account is misleading as it includes Gratian as a signatory to the peace); Zos. 4.34.4–5; Orosius 7.34.7 and *Cons. Const*. a.381. Heather (1991) 154 – argues that our sources overemphasise the episode.
30 *Cons. Const.* 381; Zos. 4.34.4–5.
31 Them. *Or.* 15.190c–d. Errington (1996b) 10–11 argues that the reference to Athanaric was a late insertion into the speech.
32 Them. *Or.* 15.191a.
33 Them. *Or.* 14.181b–c.
34 *Cons. Const*. a.382–383 October. See Errington (1996b) 17 for a discussion of the period leading up to the agreement.
35 Them. *Or.* 16.207c.
36 Maraval (2009) 53 deftly notes that "la relation de l'empereur et des Goths fut celle du patronage, une relation moins légale que morale".
37 *Cons. Const*. a.382; Them. *Or.* 16.209a; 210a. As 'slaves': *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).22.3; Lib. *Or.* 9.16. Orosius 7.34.6–7 and Syn. *de Regno*, 22.
38 Jordanes *Get.* 28.145.
39 Heather (1991) 158ff.
40 Heather (1991) 84ff; Halsall (2007) 138–161; Kulikowski (2007) 71–100 and Delaplace (2015) 81–99 all provide useful overviews of past agreements.
41 Them. *Or.* 34.21 and 22.
42 On Constantine and the Goths see Delaplace (2015) 81–85.
43 Them. *Or.* 16.199c–d. Halsall (2007) 183.
44 There is little in the coinage minted at Constantinople around this time to suggest an agreement was signed at all. One type, minted in the names of Theodosius, Arcadius and Valentinian II carries the reverse legend VICTORIA AVGVSTORVM – *RIC* IX: Constantinople, n.50 (a–c) cannot be securely linked to the agreement. At the Mint of Rome sometime after 25 August 383, coinage was minted in the names of Theodosius and Arcadius carrying the reverse legend TRIVMFATOR – GENT BARB – RIC IX: Rome, n.32, but again this may have nothing to do with the agreement of 382.
45 Them. *Or.*16.211a–b specifically places the settlers in Thrace. Zos. 4.34.5 notes that Goths keep watch on the Danube. Heather (1991) 159 argues that at least some were settled in Macedonia.
46 *Pan. Lat*. 2(12).22.3. Syn. *de Regno* 21.
47 Them. *Or.* 16.211d; *Or.* 34.22 and *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).22.3.
48 Jordanes *Get*. 21.112 – he says that the initial compact with Constantine was renewed and that Theodosius could call upon 20,000 – down from 40,000 under Constantine.
49 Visi and Tervingi: ND *Or.* 5.61 and 6.61. The most likely candidates for other units formed from barbarian recruits are those that carry a title linked to the

House of Theodosius – such as '*Theodosiana*' and '*Arcadiana*' – see Jones (1964) 1429 for a complete list. See also Heather (1991) 162, fn. 18. The question of whether these units were completely made up of barbarian recruits, or were mixed, not to mention whether these troops served under barbarian officers is a difficult one. We simply don't have enough evidence to make a firm conclusion. It is of course possible that arrangements differed from unit to unit, making our task even more difficult. It is likely that different units were set up.

50 Zos. 4.40.1–5 Burns (1994) 323, fn. 69 suggests that these troops were destined for the Scholae Palatinae.

51 Them. *Or.*16. 211a–b; *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).32.3–4.

52 Delaplace (2015) 99ff provides an excellent overview of the ongoing debates.

53 Them. *Or.* 16.211d. Halsall (2007) 184.

54 Errington (1996b) 21 and Heather (1991) 159.

55 Nixon & Rodgers (1994) 141–143, fn. 75–76 offer a very useful discussion of the *laeti*. See also Mathisen (2006). On *coloni* see Heather (1991) 123–124. Syn. *de Regno* 21 – says that Theodosius considered the Goths "worthy of citizenship". We cannot be sure whether this was hyperbole on the part of the author or whether some of the Goths, probably their leaders were given citizenship as part of the agreement.

56 Zos. 4.56.

57 Zos. 4.35 and 38–39. Triumph: *Cons. Const*. a.386, 1–2.

3 Building a regime

The Gothic threat was not Theodosius' only immediate concern. As a new emperor, he now had to build his administration from scratch. His task was made harder by the fact that as a westerner and outsider he could not simply rely on his predecessor's officials. Much has been made of the way Theodosius staffed his regime, with great focus placed on his 'coterie espagnole pieuse' who supposedly dominated his court. However, a closer examination reveals that the web of civilian and military officials that would govern in Theodosius' name was far more nuanced and complex, comprising figures from a number of interlocking spheres and shifting in form depending on the emperor's needs.[1]

Given his Spanish origins, and the fact that his career had been conducted almost solely in the west, we should not be surprised many westerners served in important positions during the nascent years of Theodosius' regime. There were Spaniards among these officials, but they were not chosen for their 'piety', and they were not as numerous as long thought. The most dominant group of Spaniards who served Theodosius were his own relations. Most of these figures were already serving in substantive positions in Gratian's administration and don't seem to have immediately followed Theodosius to actively serve as part of the eastern regime. Instead a number first received the symbolic honour of the consulship. All in all, four family members held consulships in the early years of Theodosius' reign. Flavius Eucherius, the emperor's uncle, and Claudius Antonius, a relation by marriage, held consulships respectively in 381 and 382.[2] Their consular partners for these years were the Syagrii (Flavius Syargius and Flavius Afranius Syagrius), who were related to Theodosius via his wife Flaccilla.[3] Interestingly, although the Syagrii were related to Theodosius they were most likely nominated by Gratian, either as a reward for their loyalty to his regime or because he thought that they would be a palatable choice for his new eastern colleague. As for the consulships of Eucherius and Antonius, these can only have been direct rewards for the role both individuals played in Theodosius' resuscitated career and eventual accession.[4] All four appointments served to strengthen Theodosius' position as head of a new imperial family.

Outside of relatives there were surprisingly few Spaniards in the upper echelons of the new emperor's regime. There are only three individuals among Theodosius' civilian officials who are usually considered as 'fellow Spaniards',

and even then a question mark hangs over the origins of the most prominent among them. Nebridius, who first served as the official responsible for managing the emperor's estates (*comes rei privatae*, 382–384) and then as the Prefect of Constantinople (*praefectus urbis Constantinopolitanae*, 386) was almost definitely Spanish, as was Nummius Aemilianus Dexter, who was Proconsul of Asia between 379 and 387 before being appointed as *comes rei privatae* in 387.[5] The same however cannot be said of the infamous Praetorian Prefect of the East Maternus Cynegius, whose supposed Spanish identity rests entirely on that of his wife Achantia. Recent research has seriously challenged his Spanish origins and it is entirely possible that he was actually from the east.[6] This leaves only Flavius Timasius, one of Theodosius' leading generals and a man who would serve the emperor loyally throughout his reign.[7] While it is possible that he was a Spaniard (he may have even been the empress Flaccilla's father) it is important to note that up to this point he had served primarily in the east under Valens. This makes it likely that Timasius was actually appointed to Theodosius' court by Gratian, who would have seen the general as loyal to his family, as opposed to being chosen by the new eastern emperor because of his Spanish origins. It is also possible that Gratian simply thought that Timasius, who had served in the east and likely had experience against the Goths, would be useful in the ongoing Gothic crisis.

Apart from the 'Spanish contingent' we find a number of other western figures from the Gallic and Italian aristocracy in the new regime. A prominent example is Q. Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius, a member of the leading Italian senatorial family the Anicii, and who was formerly Gratian's Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum, and who in 379 became Praetorian Prefect of the East and was honoured with the consulship.[8] Olybrius would be succeeded by a series of westerners, the Italian Flavius Neoterius; Florus, who had previously served as Master of Offices (*magister officiorum*); and finally the Roman senator Postumianus.[9] From other prominent families in the Italian aristocracy came Nicomachus Flavianus (the younger), who was appointed Proconsul of Asia in 383 (and would go on to have a storied relationship with Theodosius), and finally Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, who became *vicarius* of Asia.[10]

This western presence was not confined to the early years of the reign. In later years we find a number of Gallic figures appointed to important roles. These include the infamous Flavius Rufinus who served as Master of Offices (388–392) before being appointed Praetorian Prefect of the East (392–395), Nicomachus Flavianus (the Elder) who was Quaestor of the Sacred Palace (*quaestor sacrii palatii*) and then Praetorian Prefect of Italy and Illyricum, Latinus Pacatus Drepanius (Proconsul of Africa and *comes rei privatae*), Fl. Pisidius Romulus, Count of the Sacred Largesses; Lachanius and Marcellus (Master of Offices, 394–395).[11]

There was then a 'western bedrock' to Theodosius' administration, particularly in the early years of his reign. But while some of these figures were no doubt products of his family's strong links throughout the western hierarchy,

we must also consider whether Gratian sought to impose his own partisan supporters on Theodosius' regime. We cannot be sure just who Theodosius 'chose' to fulfil positions in his administration as opposed to any individuals who may have been forced upon him by his western colleague. But as his position in the east strengthened, his reliance on Gratian's support lessened and by the time he entered Constantinople, the choices Theodosius made as to who served in his administration reflected his growing political independence.

Although Theodosius relied heavily on western figures to staff his administration he was also aware of the need to integrate the existing power structures of the east into his regime. Tellingly, he did this in an incremental and tactical fashion. For example, early in his reign a number of key 'easterners' called to service were in fact transplants from the west. Leaving aside the general Timasius, one of the most prominent of these was Eutropius, a Gaul who had served under Constantius II and then stayed in the east to follow Julian on his Persian campaign. He would then fill positions under Valens before getting entangled in the infamous 'magic trials' and was living in semi-retirement in Asia Minor. He returned to Rome after Adrianople, where he was chosen by Theodosius to join his court as Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum (380–381).[12] Thanks to his links with Symmachus, Eutropius would prove to be a conduit for 'western talent' to join the eastern court, including the likes of the already mentioned Postumianus, and Palladius, a Greek who had been teaching rhetoric at Rome and who would become Theodosius' Count of the Sacred Largesses (381) before serving as Master of Offices (382–384).[13]

Despite such high profile 'transplants' and other westerners Theodosius had no choice but to construct many layers of his regime from 'local talent'. In particular, the vast majority of provincial governors in the east who served under Theodosius were themselves easterners. In addition, the key position of Prefect of Constantinople was also mainly filled by eastern appointees.[14] That said, officials of eastern origin are also found in key roles within the highest echelons of the regime. Earliest among these was the orator Themistius, who had served under a string of eastern emperors dating back to Constantius II. Themistius would first come into contact with Theodosius at Thessalonica in mid-to-late 379, where he delivered an oration celebrating Theodosius' accession on behalf of the people and Senate of Constantinople. The new emperor saw an opportunity to create a valuable ally in the venerable Themistius, who was not only a noted orator but someone who had helped Constantius II radically expand the Senate of Constantinople. Themistius would almost immediately prove himself a vocal and respected advocate for Theodosius, delivering numerous orations in the early 380s that were highly supportive of the regime. In return, Theodosius placed him at the centre of his circle of supporters and even made him the tutor of his son and heir Arcadius. Themistius would then go on to care for the young Augustus during Theodosius' campaign against Magnus Maximus, as well as serving as Prefect of Constantinople.[15]

Other easterners would follow Themistius into the heart of Theodosius' regime. In 388 a retired Lycian, Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus, who had enjoyed

an illustrious career under Valens, was chosen to replace Maternus Cynegius as Praetorian Prefect of the East. His appointment was particularly notable due to Theodosius' absence in the west, suggesting that the emperor not only felt it was preferable to have an easterner in the role, but that he was now confident that he had at least a measure of support among eastern circles of influence. The son of Tatianus, Proculus would also for a period become a valued member of Theodosius' inner circle and served as Count of the East (*comes orientis*, 383–384), Count of the Sacred Largesses (386), and finally Prefect of Constantinople (388–92). Other prominent easterners who served Theodosius while he was in the west include Eutychianus and Severinus.[16]

The composition of Theodosius' military leadership shows a similar diversity to that found among his civilian officials. From the west would come the Frank Richomeres, who fought in the Gothic wars before becoming Master of Soldiers for the East in 383, consul in 384 and then one of the leaders of Theodosius' expeditionary force against Magnus Maximus.[17] He would be joined by fellow Franks Bauto and Arbogast, who came east with the exiled Valentinian II after Magnus Maximus' invasion of Italy.[18] There were also numerous easterners among the most senior of Theodosius' generals. Flavius Saturninus and Victor joined Timasius as holdovers from previous eastern regimes and would serve Theodosius in the early years of his reign. Saturninus was used by the emperor to negotiate the peace agreement of 382 and both generals were important patrons for Christian figures in Constantinople. Other easterners who served in high-ranking military roles included Maiorianus (*magister utriusque militaie* or 'Master of Both Arms' for Illyricum in 379), Abundantius (*comes et magister utriusque militiae* 392–393; and consul for 393), Promotus (Magister of Infantry and Master of Cavalry, 386–391) and Stilicho. There was also a third category of Theodosian military leaders that consisted of 'barbarian' commanders from areas surrounding the eastern half of the empire. This group included the Persians Sapores (Master of Soldiers for the East) and Addaeus; as well as the Goths Modares (Master of Soldiers), Ellebichus and Butheric (Master of Soldiers for Illyricum).[19]

This diversity within Theodosius' senior military command reflects the difficult military situation he faced throughout his reign. In his early years, Theodosius was forced to rely on a limited stock of available commanders, many of whom disappear from our sources (Modares and Maiorianus) or cease to play an active role (Saturninus and Victor). But as Theodosius' political authority began to grow in the early to mid-380s, he was able to establish a core group of capable senior commanders from different backgrounds who for the most part loyally served his cause.

Theodosius' administration was also religiously diverse and from its early days contained both Christians and pagans. Once we discard the myth that the core of his regime was group of fanatical pious Christians we instead find that religious concerns were secondary for an emperor who was more concerned with the ability and loyalty of his functionaries than their theological zeal. There were of course at times a number of adversarial Christians in

Theodosius' regime but the fact remains that the emperor appointed many pagans to senior positions. Tatianus, Proculus, Eutropius, Themistius, Arbogast and the Flavianii (to name a few) were pagans and all held high office in Theodosius' administration. Just as the emperor utilised talent from across the empire, he also ignored the religious divide and instead employed the talents of individuals he thought would benefit his position.

With such a diverse range of officials in his regime Theodosius had to work carefully to ensure their continual fealty to the regime. One of the most common strategies he employed to do this was bestowing high honours such as consulships on key figures within his regime.[20] A less common, but more potent way to bring the disparate parts of his regime together was through the creation of marriage alliances. In particular, Theodosius worked to create links between his own family and the aristocracy of the east. In 386, the Spaniard Nebridius, who was serving as Prefect of Constantinople married Olympias, a grand-daughter of the famed Constantinian official Ablabius. When Nebridius died very soon after the marriage, Theodosius recognised Olympias' pedigree among the eastern elites and tried to immediately remarry her to his own relative Helpidius, a match she refused.[21]

This entire episode is very revealing. Theodosius was desperate to integrate his supporters into leading eastern families but clearly could not afford to alienate them, hence his acceptance of Olympias' refusal to immediately marry yet another Spaniard. Around the same time Theodosius' niece Serena would marry the Romano-Vandal officer Stilicho, who hailed from a family within the eastern military establishment that had served Valens. By the time of his marriage in 384, Stilicho was already on the rise and had been sent by the emperor on a diplomatic mission to Persia.[22] Again, this marriage cemented Theodosius' family into existing eastern power structures, in this case a family that had strong military connections through multi-generational service.[23] Later Theodosius' son Arcadius would enter into a similar tactical match, marrying Aelia Eudoxia, the daughter of the (now deceased) western general Bauto.[24] We can also add to this list the marriage of Gildo's daughter Salvina to Nebridius (a nephew of Flaccilla and the son of Olympias' ill-fated husband Nebridius), although here there were also specific tactical and political reasons for the match.[25] Finally, and outside the emperor's family, we have the example of Maternus Cynegius and the Spaniard Achantia. If Cynegius was indeed an easterner (as posited earlier) it is possible that the emperor engineered his marriage to Achantia in yet another attempt to merge east and west within his new administration.

Theodosius faced great difficulties in putting together a new administration in 379. His links to the east were tenuous at best and he had no choice but to rely on more familiar western figures to support him in unchartered territory. Even then, given that many westerners within the new eastern government had previously served under Gratian, one wonders whether their first loyalties remained with the western emperor? Another possibility is that Theodosius had to choose some of his new officials for the simple fact that they could

speak and understand Greek, the language of the east. No matter how many westerners the emperor brought with him, he had no choice but to integrate the governing class of the east into his regime. Theodosius did this in a number of ways. As his court matured, he promoted easterners, some formerly from the west, to senior positions in both the military and civil hierarchy. Many in the east would have been keen to demonstrate loyalty to the new regime, and their efforts would not have gone unnoticed by an emperor keen for local allies. At a lower level he relied primarily on eastern officials to keep the wheels of provincial governance turning. By the mid-380s his efforts paid dividends and the emperor felt comfortable enough leaving the east in 'local' hands when he left to campaign against western usurpers. Importantly though, the composition of Theodosius' regime was never static. As his own situation changed he had to ensure that those around him formed a cohesive administration that reflected both his practical governing requirements as well as his morphing political needs. As we will see, when he took responsibility for the west in 388, he would face a new set of problems in trying to establish his administration in an area of the empire that now considered him and his supporters as outsiders.

Notes

1 Piganiol (1947) 218.
2 Bagnall (1987) 296–299. Interestingly both seemed to stay in their existing substantive roles under Gratian in the immediate aftermath of Theodosius' accession. See also *PLRE* 1, Fl. Eucherius 2 and Claudius Antonius 5. *Epit. Caes.* 48.18 notes the great esteem Theodosius held his uncle in.
3 Matthews (1975) 76; Martindale (1967). See also *PLRE* 1, Flavius Syargius 3 and Flavius Afranius Syagrius 2.
4 See Chapter 1, page 24.
5 Chastagnol (1964) 290; Matthews (1967) 440. On the role of the *comes rei privatae* see Delmaire (1995) 13–16.
6 On the potential eastern origins of Maternus Cynegius see Bravo (1996) and Moreno (2002) 179–186. On the Spanish origins of Achantia see *Cons. Const.* a.388.
7 *PLRE* 1, Flavius Timasius.
8 *PLRE* 1, Q.Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius 3.
9 *PLRE* 1, Flavius Neoterius; Florus 1, Postumianus 2.
10 *PLRE* 1, Nichomachus Flavianus 14; Ceionius Rufius Volusianus 3.
11 *PLRE* 1, Flavius Rufinus 18; Nichomachus Flavianus 15, Latinus Pacatus Drepanius; Fl.Pisidius Romulus 5; Cl. Lachanius and Marcellus 7. See also Matthews (1971) for extensive commentary on a number of these figures. On the role of the Count of the Sacred Largesses see Delmaire (1989) 18–21.
12 See *PLRE* 1, Eutropius 2 for his career progression. Matthews (1975) 97 thinks this was perhaps thanks to a recommendation from Symmachus.
13 *PLRE* 1, Palladius 12.
14 See the Fasti provided at *PLRE* 1, page 1099ff for a comprehensive list.
15 *PLRE* 1, Themistius 1. Arcadius: Them. *Or.* 16.204b–c; 213a–b and *Or. 18*.224 a–c. He received some criticism for taking this office: Them *Or.* 31 and 34.

16 *PLRE* 1, Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus 5 and Proculus 6. Both would fall from grace late in Theodosius' reign thanks to the plotting of Rufinus – see Chapter 9. Eunap. fr. 57 suggests that both individuals were brought into Theodosius' regime at the urging of others.
17 *PLRE* 1, Flavius Richomeres. He had a number of proteges who probably came westwards with him, including Palladius, who would serve as *comes orientis*. See *PLRE* 1 Palladius 13.
18 *PLRE* 1, Flavius Bauto and Arbogastes.
19 *PLRE* 1, Flavius Saturninus 10; Victor 4; Maiorianus; Moderatus; Flavius Abundantius; Flavius Promotus; Flavius Stilicho; Sapores; Addaeus; Modares; Ellebichus and Butherichus.
20 For a more detailed discussion of how Theodosius bound the military to his cause see Appendix 1.
21 Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 193; Pall. *Hist. Laus.* 56 and Soz. 8.9. *PLRE* 1, Olympias 2.
22 Claudian *de cos. Stil*. 1.51–68. Serena's sister Thermantia would also be married to one of Theodsoius' generals – whose name is not preserved – see Claudian. *Laus Serenae* 187.
23 Stilicho's father had served as a cavalry officer under Valens see Claudian *de cos. Stil*. 1.35–39.
24 See *PLRE* 2, Aelia Eudoxia. The situation here is somewhat different as a number of sources intimate that the young emperor was manipulated into the marriage by the eunuch Eutropius.
25 See Chapter 5, page 75.

4 'Heresy', politics, and power

After his death Theodosius was revered not only as a hero of the Christian faith but as a warrior for the Nicene doctrine and an implacable foe of 'heretics', particularly in the east where Constantius II and Valens had reaped god's displeasure by supporting the hated Arians. Less than 20 years after his death Augustine paints a picture of his unceasing campaign against heresy "from the very commencement of his reign, he did not cease to help the troubled church against the impious by most just and merciful laws, which the heretical Valens, favouring the Arians, had vehemently afflicted". [1] During the debates at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 Theodosius is acknowledged as the originator of imperial protection for 'orthodox' Nicene Christianity, "[s]ince the most pious emperor, in accordance with the tradition inherited from his grandfather, is accustomed to protect the orthodox faith and the canons from being violated."[2]

To his many admirers Theodosius was more than an emperor who happened to support the Nicene doctrine. He was an instrument of a divine and pre-ordained plan. In his account of Theodosius' rise to power Theodoret says that just before his accession the soon-to-be emperor had a vision of being crowned emperor by the Nicene bishop Meletius.[3] This fantastical story, more myth than history (there is no evidence that Theodosius even knew of Meletius' existence at this stage), is designed to show that not only was Theodosius divinely sanctioned to promote the Nicene cause but that the emperor himself believed this to be a *raison d'être* for his reign.[4] While we can easily dismiss the miraculous from our historical narrative, it is easy to see why later writers viewed Theodosius as someone who had carried out god's will. He had been an implacable supporter of the Nicene cause and on balance his reign was crucial to the doctrinal unification of the church. But what were Theodosius' motivations in inserting himself so vigorously into the doctrinal disputes of the church? Was his unflagging support for the Nicene position driven by a sincere religious dedication or were his actions influenced by a more subtle blend of considerations?

Before we examine Theodosius' interactions with the eastern church it is worth looking at the religious landscape into which the emperor was about to venture. As we have seen, the church was wracked by doctrinal squabbles

during the fourth century and following the death of Constantine different emperors would regularly take sides (to differing degrees) in these squabbles. By the time Theodosius came to power, the Church was an ingrained part of society. It was wealthy, involved in a raft of community activities and its members were active in the top echelons of the secular world, whether that be the imperial bureaucracy or the army.

Importantly, the doctrinal split between those who remained loyal to the Nicene formula of the trinity agreed to in 325 under Constantine and those who rejected it in favour of the compromise solution agreed to at the twin councils of Ariminum and Seleukia in 358, took on a distinctly geographical flavour. In the west, the Nicene creed remained generally accepted, while in the east, perhaps driven by a long heritage of "theological-philosophical speculation" it was for the most part abandoned. The last two Christian emperors to rule the east for any period of time, Constantius and Valens, were active proponents of what we can call the non-Nicean view of the Trinity and actively supported bishops who accepted the Ariminum formula.[5] It is particularly important to note that under Valens, the east was far less theologically monolithic than the west. Although the non-Nicene factions of the east are often slandered in our sources with the inaccurate label of 'Arians' they were in fact a diverse group. Along with supporters of the Ariminum formula, other 'non-Nicene' factions included the Eunomians and Photians. There was also a large block of so called 'Macedonianists' in the Asia Minor region, whose beliefs were similar to the Nicene Christians of the west. There was even a small community of Nicene supporters in the east, but they were helplessly fractured. Interestingly, just before his death Valens, in a move for which he does not receive any credit for in the sources, recalled previously banished Nicene bishops, demonstrating a pragmatic approach to religious matters. This move would prove crucial in creating the religious landscape inherited by Theodosius.[6] In short, if Theodosius wished to establish himself in an area with which he had little personal connection, he could not afford to ignore the theological intricacies of the eastern church. We will never know just how much the emperor understood about the state of the church in the east when he came to power, but he must have known both that its fractured state had proved very difficult for past emperors to control and that any attempt to impose his own Nicene faith would be very provocative to his new subjects.

For 'all' the people

Our sources stress that Theodosius hailed from a family of devout Spanish Nicene Christians.[7] However, this does not mean that Theodosius himself held a pre-made doctrinal worldview or a desire to enforce it upon the empire. While he may have come from a Nicene family, he was to all intents and purposes a child of the army camps, travelling with his father as the latter built an impressive military career.[8] Some would point to this institution as a useful conditioning ground for a strong Christian identity, although it is far from clear just how

devout the army was as a whole – even by the late fourth century.[9] In short, there is no evidence that Theodosius took any notice of theological affairs or was known as being particularly pious before he became emperor. Indeed, even as emperor he remained unaware of long-standing theological issues within the Spanish church.[10] Our Christian sources are clearly silent regarding his early life because there was nothing there that they could use to support their ongoing narrative about the emperor's supposed piety.

We should not be surprised then that upon coming to power Theodosius' immediate interests were far removed from matters of church doctrine. Instead, his laws show that he was more concerned with pressing secular issues including the ongoing Gothic war; administrative matters within the imperial bureaucracy; and the perilous state of city councils in the east.[11] For a supposedly fervent Nicene adherent who had just gained absolute power over half the empire, this was an unusually restrained approach and again reconfirms that Theodosius did not come to power with a ready-to-implement 'pro-Nicene' agenda.

There is however a glaring exception to this early pattern that has gone on to become the cornerstone of Theodosius' posthumous reputation as a Nicene hero. On 28th February 380, while still in Thessalonica, Theodosius delivered an edict that many consider to be a significant turning point in the development of a doctrinally unified Christian church within the empire. This edict was called *cunctos populos* and it reads:

> We wish the citizens of all cities that the moderation of Our Clemency rules to practice that form of religion which, as the religious tradition introduced by himself and reaching out until the present day maintains, Holy Peter the Apostle brought to the Romans, and which it is evident that Bishop Damasus and Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness, follow: that is, that we should believe, in accordance with apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the evangelists, in the single divine being of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, within an equal majesty and a holy trinity. We command persons accepting this rule to embrace the name of catholic Christians; but the rest, whom we judge to be out of their minds and insane, shall suffer the disgrace attached to heretical dogma, their meeting places shall not bear the name "church", they are first to be stricken by punishment from God, but later by the vengeance of our passion, which we shall have assumed in accordance with the judgement of heaven.[12]
>
> (trans. Pharr)

On first glance this edict seems to be an imperial attempt to impose the emperor's preferred 'brand' of Christianity on all of his new subjects. Sozomen clearly believed as such, writing that:

> Theodosius enacted a law at Thessalonica, which he caused to be published at Constantinople, well knowing that the rescript would speedily become public to all the other cities, if issued from that city, which is as a

> citadel of the whole empire. He made known by this law his intention of leading all his subjects to the reception of that faith which Peter, the chief of the apostles, had, from the beginning, preached to the Romans, and which was professed by Damasus, bishop of Rome, and by Peter, bishop of Alexandria. He enacted that the title of Catholic Church should be exclusively confined to those who rendered equal homage to the Three Persons of the Trinity, and that those individuals who entertained opposite opinions should be treated as heretics, regarded with contempt, and delivered over to punishment.[13]
>
> (trans. Hartranft)

Sozomen also believed that he knew why Theodosius had handed down the edict. He says that Theodosius acted directly after recovering from a life-threatening illness that was so severe he had asked to be baptised by the Nicene bishop Acholius in case he died.[14] During his recovery, Theodosius questioned the bishop, who he credited with his recovery, about the state of the church in his new domain. Sozomen claims that when Acholius told him that "towards the East, and particularly at Constantinople, the people were divided into many different heresies" he decided to act. By placing *cunctos populos* straight after his sickness, Sozomen insinuates that this was Theodosius' response to his miraculous recovery. He had been saved only because he was a dutiful Nicene Christian and he now had to repay this act by wiping out the 'heretical' doctrines of the east he believed, or at least was told, that god found so abhorrent.

A closer examination of both the edict itself and Sozomen's account however shows that *cunctos populos* was not the far-reaching edict it has been purported to be nor was it motivated by a sense of religious obligation. It is suspicious that none of our sources apart from Sozomen (including the contemporaneous Gregory of Nazianzus) deemed the edict important enough to mention, especially given their interest in emphasising Theodosius' role in fighting heresy.[15] There are also a number of inaccuracies in Sozomen's account. First, Sozomen has made a chronological error (perhaps deliberately) in placing the edict after Theodosius' sickness and baptism when in fact the edict pre-dates it by some months. We must then discount the idea that the edict was a direct result of a religious fervour caused by his miraculous recovery. [16] Second, Sozomen also assumes that although the edict was proclaimed in Constantinople, it would be made known across the empire. There is no evidence this ever happened.[17]

We have a crucial clue as to what Theodosius actually aimed to achieve with his edict in the fact that it was addressed to the Prefect of Constantinople. Despite its initial reference to "all the peoples", this was an edict targeting the religious landscape of Constantinople and not a blunt instrument designed to enforce Nicene doctrine throughout the east. If Theodosius had wished the edict to be more widely implemented, he would have addressed it to the Praetorian Prefect of the East. What's more, after his initial

entrance into the city, the practical enforcement of the new edict ("their meeting places shall not bear the name 'church', they are first to be stricken by punishment from God, but later by the vengeance of our passion") was restricted to Constantinople.

Above all *cunctos populos* was a highly political pre-emptive strike. Theodosius was never going to stay in Thessalonica on a permanent basis. He needed to come east to cement his tenuous hold over Valens' former territories. Ever the politician, Theodosius was preparing for his formal entry (*adventus*) into Constantinople, a city which was to become the symbolic lynchpin of his new regime. He realised that he could not hope to establish himself – a westerner – in a city run by an alien religious hierarchy that owed him nothing. It has plausibly been suggested that the edict may have been delivered in response to a query from representatives of Constantinople, who wished to know his intentions for their city and that may be the case. If this is so then Theodosius skilfully exploited the request to signal that he was determined to dictate church affairs from the moment he entered his new capital. *Cunctos populos* was a calculated and necessary signal from an emperor who was in a very weak political situation and who was determined to stamp his authority quickly on the most important city in the east. Its real importance lies in the fact that it was a public indication that the new emperor intended to play an activist role in the doctrinal affairs of his domain.[18]

However, if we are to cast *cunctos populos* as the first step in a political program to impose the Nicene doctrine on the eastern church, we must ask why Theodosius wanted to undertake such a program in the first place. Why didn't he simply choose to take the path of least resistance; adapt to the existing theological currents of the east and endear himself to the eastern church leaders whose support he would need?

Traditionally, this question has been answered by assuming Theodosius was simply a true believer, inculcated in the Nicene faith thanks to his western origins. But as we have seen, there is nothing in his life thus far to suggest such a burning passion. It is of course plausible that Theodosius made his decision under the influence of advisors keen for him to further the Nicene cause. Given that the bishop Acholius was with Theodosius at Thessalonica and had baptised him at the depths of his sickness, he would be one such candidate. However, Theodosius' natural sympathies towards the Nicene cause and the influences of doctrinally aligned bishops all pale into insignificance next to his immediate political needs.

From the first moments of his reign Theodosius had clearly reasoned that the status quo of the eastern church was unsustainable, "a net of dogmatic, regional-historical and personal differences . . . which by the time of Valens' death reached a level of complexity which was unknown in the West".[19] With some understanding of the patchwork of theological creeds across the east, not to mention the tumultuous history that went with them, Theodosius clearly calculated that he could not create a loyal church in lockstep with his

regime out of the powerful yet disparate theological groupings in his new domain and would instead have to remake it in his own fashion. Theodosius knew that the church could prove to be a key stabiliser for his nascent regime and as a product of the west he would have recognised the politically unifying power of the Nicene position, which he himself was inclined to. Perhaps most importantly, by supporting the minority Nicene faction, he would also create an excuse to personally appoint a raft of new bishops. One suspects that in the emperor's mind their loyalty to the Nicene cause would be secondary to the loyalty they would be expected to show to his regime.

Constantinople

This attitude permeates the aggressive approach Theodosius subsequently took in remodelling the eastern church. After entering Constantinople in November 380, he immediately summoned the venerable and well-liked leader of the dominant Arian (*Homoian*) faction, Demophilus to see if he and his followers would abandon their past beliefs and adapt the Nicene creed. Although Socrates, and to a lesser extent Gregory of Nazianzus, present Theodosius' demand as a noble attempt to unify the faith and bring peace to the church, it was clear that the new emperor would brook no opposition.[20] The canny Demophilus knew that even with the people of Constantinople on his side, any resistance would be futile in the face of the emperor's troops. Accordingly, after refusing to 'switch sides' and in accordance with the imperial wishes laid out in *cunctos populos*, he and his followers simply vacated their churches and left the city.[21] This episode again reinforces the limited nature of *cunctos populos*. Demophilus could resume preaching, and did, because the edict was considered to have no force outside the city walls of Constantinople.

Theodosius was now free to fill the crucial bishopric of Constantinople with his own candidate. It would prove a difficult exercise. The Nicene community in the east was driven by factionalism and personality politics. An Alexandrian named Maximus, with support from Peter of Alexandria, claimed to be the rightful candidate by canon law, but he had already been rejected by Theodosius while the emperor was resident at Thessalonica. Instead Theodosius chose Gregory of Nazianzus, who was nominally supported by the eastern Nicene powerbrokers Basil of Caesarea and Meletius of Antioch.[22] The installation of the new bishop was dramatic. The vast majority of the city remained attached to the Homosian position and in the face of hostile crowds Theodosius was forced to use the army to install Gregory in the city's cathedral.[23] Theodosius' rejection of the west's candidate for the Maximus was significant as it shows that, while he was willing to implement the dominant Christian doctrine of the west, he wished to be free from their political interference. Theodosius knew that Maximus, who was nicknamed the 'cynic' because he dressed like a shabby philosopher, would never have been accepted by the ruling class of Constantinople.

Having established his personal authority in Constantinople, Theodosius now felt confident enough to strike further afield in the crucial Prefecture of Illyricum. In January 381, he issued a new edict to Eutropius, Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum that sought to deprive 'heretical' sects of the basis of their power and influence in the community – their churches – ("no place for celebrating their mysteries, no opportunity for exercising the madness of their excessively obstinate minds shall be available to the heretics. . . ."). Unlike *cunctos populos* this edict specifically named its targets ("the contamination of the Photinian pestilence, the poison of the Arian perfidy, and the sectarian monstrosities, abominable because of the ill-omened names of their authors, shall be abolished even from the hearing of men"). It also laid out direct and unequivocal actions that would be taken against the heretics:

> They shall be removed and completely barred from the threshold of all churches. . . . We forbid all heretics to hold unlawful assemblies within the towns. We order that their madness be banished and that they shall be driven away from the very walls of the cities. . . .
>
> (trans. Pharr)[24]

This was an edict that Theodosius expected his Praetorian Prefect to enforce to the letter. It reads as a 'how to manual' for his secular official, including a quick doctrinal primer on what constituted the true faith.[25] Theodosius was clearly attempting to ensure that the church in the major urban centres of Illyricum, a crucial bridge between east and west, was beholden to his regime. The tactical nature of this edict is further shown by the fact that Theodosius was uninterested in the rural areas of Illyricum, no doubt realising that it would be ill-advised to antagonise the Arian-leaning Gothic communities along the Danubian frontier. This edict also sent a strong message to the west, where Gratian was planning to hold a church council at Aquileia, that Theodosius would manage his own religious affairs in his own manner.[26]

Theodosius was now ready to remake the eastern church. Accordingly, he turned to a familiar mechanism that had been pioneered by Constantine and used heavily by Constantius II: the church Council. On its surface Theodosius' Council of Constantinople (as it would become known) was designed with a simple task – to settle who should become Bishop of Constantinople. However, the circumstances in which it was held were very significant. Not only was it designed to compete against Gratian's own conference at Aquileia but it was also symbolic of Theodosius'new role as head of the church and the radical agenda he intended to carry out.

The conference was held in 381, with its participants hand-picked by the emperor. Overall around 150 bishops attended, with very few participants from the west. Those who were invited, such as Acholius (who arrived late) and Peter of Alexandria (who died before the conference) were trusted allies of the emperor. From the east, only those considered of the 'Nicene' persuasion had been invited, making it clear who would be acceptable members of

the emperor's new ecclesiastical regime.[27] Most of these were aligned with the influential Bishop of Antioch Meletius and Gregory of Nazianzus, although a smaller faction supported Paulinus of Antioch.[28] Only one group attending the conference were not technically followers of the Nicene doctrine, a group of 36 bishops known as 'Macedonianists', who held to an extremely similar theology and even more importantly hailed from the strategically important region near Constantinople.[29] While Theodosius was clearly hoping that they could be convinced to enter the fold, his hopes were dashed when they left almost immediately refusing to change their doctrinal position.[30]

Despite this early setback, the Council went to work confirming Gregory in his position and confirming Theodosius' independence from the west by nullifying the election and appointments of the self-proclaimed Bishop of Constantinople Maximus. However, things took a difficult turn when Meletius, a strong personality who had bound much of the small Nicene faction in the east together, suddenly died. The conference stalled, and not even the late arrival of the emperor's personal favourite Acholius, or the Egyptian delegation was enough to re-start proceedings. Meletius' death added yet another problem for the emperor in his efforts to remake the eastern church. Although Meletius had been bishop of Antioch since 360, he did not enjoy unanimous support from the city's Nicene community, where a smaller faction supported Paulinus, a supposed Nicene 'hardliner' who had been recognised as the 'real' Bishop of Antioch by Rome.[31] Dealing with this turmoil now became the job of Gregory, who took over as the Council's Chairman. He attempted a quick fix by suggesting a solution supported by the western church – that Paulinus (who wasn't present at the conference) simply take over the Meletian congregation and unify the Nicene community of Antioch. This outraged the Meletian faction, who had supported Gregory's own accession to the see of Constantinople and who expected him in return to support their candidate Flavianus. Gregory's authority was further challenged by attacks from the Macedonian delegation and Timotheus of Alexandria, who had replaced his brother Peter upon the latter's untimely death, and who remained reluctant to accept Gregory's election as Bishop of Constantinople.[32] Gregory was left with no choice but to appeal to the emperor himself for support and threaten to resign if it wasn't forthcoming. However, he had severely misjudged the emperor's hopes for his Council. Having started to undertake such an aggressive reform of the church, Theodosius could not risk angering his new Nicene powerbase. Nor did he want a Bishop of Constantinople who could be swayed by the western church. Accordingly, Theodosius accepted Gregory's resignation.[33]

With his Gregory experiment proving disastrous, Theodosius' next choice for the position was an elderly Senator named Nectarius. It was a telling choice by the emperor who Sozomen tells us "reserved to himself the right of nominating any one of those whose names were submitted to him'.[34] Suggested by the Bishop Diodorus, himself a key player in the Meletian faction, the elderly Nectarius had previously served as a Praetor and was a well-respected figure in the city. Doctrinal concerns did not seem to matter.

Nectarius had not been a combatant in the ongoing religious turmoils of the age and had not even been baptised. In short, he was the absolute definition of a 'safe pair of hands' – loyal, steady, and with strong connections among the city's ruling elite.[35] Theodosius' choice would pay significant political dividends as Nectarius would prove to be extremely loyal to Theodosius throughout his reign. The emperor now had the stability he craved for the most important city of his new domain.[36]

With Nectarius at the helm the Council would continue. Flavianus was duly elected as Bishop of Antioch, although the decision did nothing to reunite the fractured community in that city and the problem was left to fester. At its conclusion, the conference produced four significant canons all of which furthered Theodosius' political aims despite the emperor being persona non grata for the discussions that took place.[37] The first canon reconfirmed the Nicene creed (albeit with some minor changes to suit eastern sensibilities) and formally anathematised a range of heretical groups. This canon merely rubber-stamped the emperor's previous edicts – but it was nonetheless an important symbolic tick for the new regime's religious authority.[38] The second canon banned bishops from becoming involved in the ecclesiastical affairs of other dioceses. This brought the church into line with the civil structure of the empire, but it also showed that Theodosius understood the empire wide nature of the church and the reach of its powerbrokers. He had seen the chaos wrought by western interference in the bishoprics of both Constantinople and Antioch and was determined to develop a mechanism that would limit the reach of external voices and give him more control over the church.[39]

Canon Three gave the Bishop of Constantinople pre-eminence over all other sees except for that of Rome. As the text of the canon explained, Constantinople was now the "New Rome". Theodosius cared little about the original apostolic sees but he did wish to proclaim to the world that the city he resided in was not only the centre of his empire's secular power – it was now the spiritual heart of the east.[40] More widely the canon made an important statement regarding Constantinople's role in the ideology of the new regime. While Constantius and Valens had spent significant periods away from the city, Theodosius was making it the powerbase of a new dynasty. It would retain this status even after Theodosius took control of the west.[41] Canon Four was the least consequential and was merely used to publicly confirm that the tenure, actions and decisions of Maximus the Cynic had now been 'officially' erased.

Shortly after the Council concluded, Theodosius moved quickly to exploit the stamp of legitimacy it had given him by tightening his grip over the church in other areas of his new empire. On 30th July 381 he handed down an edict (*episcopis tradi*) to Auxonius, the Proconsul of Asia that handed over all churches to the now dominant Nicene faction. The law stated that:

> We command that all churches shall immediately be surrendered to those bishops who confess that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of one majesty and virtue, of the same glory, and of one splendour; to those

> bishops who produce no dissonance by unholy distinction, but who affirm the concept of the Trinity by the assertion of three persons and the unity of the divinity; to those Bishops who appear to have been associated in the communion of Nectarius, Bishop of Constantinople, and of Timotheus, Bishop of the City of Alexandria in Egypt; to those Bishops also who, in the regions of the Orient, appear to be communicants with Pelagius, Bishop of Laodicea and with Diodorus, Bishop of Tarsus; also, in the Proconsular Province of Asia and in the Diocese of Asia, with Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium, and with Optimus, Bishop of Antioch; in the Diocese of Pontus, with Helladius, Bishop of Caesarea, and with Otreius of Melitene, and with Gregorius, Bishop of Nyssa; with Terennius, Bishop of Scythia, and with Marmarius, Bishop of Martianopolis. Those Bishops who are of the communion and fellowship of such acceptable priests must be permitted to obtain the Catholic churches. All, however, who dissent from the communion of the faith of those who have been expressly mentioned in this special enumeration shall be expelled from their churches as manifest heretics and hereafter shall be altogether denied the right and power to obtain churches in order that the priesthood of the true Nicene faith may remain pure, and after the clear regulations of Our law, there shall be no opportunity for malicious subtlety.[42]
>
> (trans. Pharr)

The purpose of this edict is best understood in its political context. Like *cunctos populos*, it was not an empire–wide decree but was instead deliberately targeted using the canons of the Council of Constantinople as cover. In particular the edict echoed Canon I, even listing many of the same heretical targets. It specifically targeted the Diocese of Asia, which was a crucial area close to the capital, and a pivotal region between east and west.[43] We know that none of the bishops of this diocese, with the exception of the Macedonian delegation, had attended the Council of Constantinople. This edict was therefore nothing short of a blueprint for the wholescale removal of the existing 'heretical' ecclesiastical power structure in the diocese and its replacement with loyalists of the new regime. It details what theological creed was now acceptable, how a candidate could prove his allegiance to this creed, and perhaps most importantly an unequivocal imperial command about the fate of the incumbents. They were now declared heretics and would be cast out of their churches with no access to the resources of the church.

A second edict followed in the same month.[44] Handed down to the Count of the East Clicherius, it banned Eunomians, Arians and followers of 'Aetius' from building churches and confiscated any properties on which illegal churches had been constructed. This edict again demonstrates the emperor's absolute determination to personally enforce his new agenda in areas where resistance to change was strong. Also significant is that this edict was handed down to a military official suggesting that it was to be enforced with some severity.

Despite the emperor's determination, opposition to his propagation of the Nicene doctrine did not immediately wither and die. In June of 383 Theodosius was forced to call a meeting of the different Christian leaders in the east. Nectarius represented the Nicenes, Agelius the Novatians, Demophilus the Homoians, Eleusis the Macedonianists and Eunomius, whose name was carried by his followers. The emperor's strident attitude had not changed. After the leaders had gathered, he asked them each to provide a written statement of their beliefs regarding the nature of the trinity. After receiving each statement, Theodosius rather theatrically tore all of them up except the Nicene position. According to Socrates this had the desired effect on many of the dissenting sects who subsequently lost a lot of followers to the Nicene doctrine.[45] Such a claim raises a number of suspicions as a mere six months later Theodosius was forced to hand down two more edicts aimed at the followers of doctrines now considered 'heretical'. The first of these banned heretical groups from meeting publicly or privately in any number, either in the cities or in the countryside. This was quickly followed by another edict that again formally drove Eunomians, 'Arians' and Apollinarians from Constantinople.[46]

Despite the vigour with which Theodosius continued to impose his vision for a unified eastern church, he was not entirely successful in his initial flourish. In 388 new laws appeared again banning "all members of diverse and perfidious sects" from meeting with special watchmen appointed to ensure compliance. Later edicts again banned heretics from meeting and creating their own clergy. Penalties included fines for the rich and beatings and deportation for the poor.[47]

While Theodosius went about remodelling the eastern church in an aggressive manner, our sources are at pains to paint him as an emperor who persuaded not persecuted those yet to embrace the 'true faith'.[48] Rufinus claims that while he handed over churches to 'Catholics' he always exercised great restraint and spurned revenge.[49] Socrates however admits rare cases of persecution, but presents the emperor as having no choice:

> [he] persecuted none of them except Eunomius; but inasmuch as the latter, by holding meetings in private houses at Constantinople, where he read the works he had composed, corrupted many with his doctrines, he ordered him to be sent into exile. Of the other heretics he interfered with no one; nor did he constrain them to hold communion with himself; but he allowed them all to assemble in their own conventicles, and to entertain their own opinions on points of Christian faith. Permission to build themselves churches without the cities was granted to the rest…
>
> (trans. Zenos)

Sozomen on the other hand is at pains to say that the edicts handed down by the emperor against heretics were not actually enforced: "Great as were the punishments adjudged by the laws against heretics, they were not always carried into execution; for the emperor had no desire to persecute his subjects;

he only desired to enforce uniformity of religion through the medium of intimidation. Those who voluntarily renounced the heretical opinions received great commendation from him" (trans. Hartranft).[50] Such protestations clearly run counter to the raft of targeted and in some cases severe anti-heretical legislation that Theodosius handed down during his reign – something even the emperor's fierce supporters are forced to admit. Socrates, before launching into a passionate defence of the emperor's clemency, sheepishly notes that 'Arians' were actually ejected from the churches.[51] Likewise Sozomen is forced to acknowledge that "some of the heterodox were expelled from the cities and villages, while others were disgraced, and deprived of the privileges enjoyed by other subjects of the empire" (trans. Hartranft). [52]

In the early years of his reign, particularly after entering Constantinople, Theodosius worked assiduously to remake the eastern church. The sheer number of edicts he handed down should not be taken as a sign that they were weakly enforced or simply not meant to be implemented. Instead it shows the level of determination and forethought that Theodosius brought to his plans for a new church. Despite the opposition he would face, his plans would be vital to ensuring the long-term viability of his regime in the east. Theodosius knew as a follower of the Nicene creed that he would be treated with suspicion by the non-Nicene forces of the east. But more importantly, he recognised that the patchwork of squabbling doctrines that inhabited the eastern church would not be a solid foundation for his regime. He was right. The stubborn strength of the non-Nicene forces in the face of their ongoing loss of institutional support shows an ingrained strength that a new emperor from the west could never hope to harness and could only try to replace. Theodosius knew he could not kill his way to total obedience and instead deprived his enemies of their assets and infrastructure.[53] His hostile takeover of the eastern church was conducted in measured and deliberate steps. Edicts were targeted to areas considered particularly important to the emperor, especially the capital; its surrounds and the region that bordered the western empire. Theodosius was determined to turn the church into an institutional bulwark for his regime, and the body of actions he took (particularly via legislation) to achieve this was substantial. His program did take time and even though he never completely wiped out competing Christian doctrines he was able to deliver a very significant outcome in the form of a unified church that was an extension of his regime.

Notes

1 Aug. *Civ. Dei* 35.
2 *C. Chalc.* 1.565.
3 Theod. *HE* 5.6.
4 On Meletius see Errington (1997a) 43 who shows that he was not even personally known to the emperor at the time of the Council of Constantinople.
5 Errington (1997a) 27 quite rightly says that "The Ecclesiastical situation in the East on his accession was thus shaped by Constantius and continued and developed by Valens."

6 See Snee (1985) and Errington (1997a) 27ff for a full discussion. Many orthodox sources chose to ignore of minimise Valens' actions preferring to see him simply as a persecutor and instead focus on the tolerance edict of Gratian.
7 Soz. 7.4 "The parents of Theodosius were Christians, and were attached to the Nicene doctrines." Soc. 5.6 "[Theodosius] had been instructed in Christian principles by his ancestors, and professed the 'homoousian' faith." More generally, Orosius 7.33.7 states that Theodosius the Elder was baptised prior to his execution in 375.
8 As noted by McLynn (2005) 102ff. *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).8 discusses Theodosius' youth on campaign with his father. On Theodosius the Elder's military career see Chapter One of the current work.
9 McLynn (2005) 105.
10 McLynn (1994) 106, fn. 99.
11 See Errington (1997a) 23ff.
12 *CTh*. 16.1.2.
13 Soz. 7.4.
14 Soz. 7.4. See also Soc. 5.6, who has Theodosius ask the bishop about his doctrinal positions: "There he [Thessalonica] was taken dangerously ill, and expressed a desire to receive Christian baptism. Now he had been instructed in Christian principles by his ancestors, and professed the 'homoousian' faith. Becoming increasingly anxious to be baptised therefore, as his malady grew worse, he sent for the bishop of Thessalonica, and first asked him what doctrinal views he held? The bishop having replied, 'that the opinion of Arius had not yet invaded the provinces of Illyricum, nor had the novelty to which that heretic had given birth begun to prey upon the churches in those countries; but they continued to preserve unshaken that faith which from the beginning was delivered by the apostles, and had been confirmed in the Nicene Synod,' the emperor was most gladly baptised by the bishop Acholius. . . ." (trans. Zenos).
15 McLynn (1994) 108.
16 Soz. 7.4. For the timeline of this period see Errington (1997b) 415ff. Despite the 'political' nature of *cunctos populos* we cannot discount the hand of Acholius in its drafting.
17 Soz. 7.4.
18 Greg. Naz. *vit. sua* 1282–1289.
19 Errington (1997a) 33.
20 Soc. 5.7 and Greg. Naz. *vit. sua* 1311–1395.
21 Soz. 7.5 and Soc. 5.7.
22 Errington (2006) 219ff offers a useful overview of the situation.
23 Greg. Naz. *vit. sua*. 1325–1341.
24 *CTh*. 16.5.6.
25 *CTh.* 16.5.6. "On the other hand, that man shall be accepted as a defender of the Nicene faith and as a true adherent of the Catholic religion who confesses that Almighty God and Christ the Son of God are One in name, God of God, Light of Light, who does not violate by denial the Holy Spirit which we hope for and receive from the Supreme author of things; that man who esteems, with the perception of inviolate faith, the undivided substance of the incorrupt trinity, that substance which those of the orthodox faith call, employing a Greek word, *ousia*" (trans. Pharr).
26 Errington (2006) 222–223 and Maraval (2009) 115–116. See also Errington (1997a) 48–49. Council of Aquileia: This Council, which was held in September 381 seems to have been called to solve the conflict between Nicene and Homoian forces in Illyricum, which as far as ecclesiastical matters went remained Gratian's responsibility. The geographical scope of the invited participants remains clouded –

particularly the reference to invitations to 'orientales'. See Errington (2006) 195–201 for a full discussion.

27 Soc. 5.8.1 says that the participants were "prelates of his [i.e. the emperor's] own faith". Soz. 7.7.1 simply says the participants were "orthodox bishops". Theod. *HE* 7.9.13, in his characteristic style, claims the Council was "ecumenical" – but provides no evidence to back this claim up.
28 King (1961) 24 – explains the difference between the two eastern orthodox groups.
29 Errington (1997a) 45.
30 Soc. 5.8.2.
31 Errington (2006) 184ff gives the history of the conflict.
32 Greg. Naz. *vit. sua* 1800–1802.
33 Greg. Naz. *vit. sua* 1819–1904.
34 Soz. 7.8.
35 Errington (1997a) 59ff.
36 Edwards (2004) 205 and 261.
37 A fact that again speaks against the idea that the emperor had any personal interest in theological concerns beyond the outcomes they could deliver for his regime.
38 *COD* 27 (Mansi III, 560) anathemised groups included the Eunomians, Arians, Pneumatomachoi, Sabellians, Marcellians, Photinians and the Appollinarians.
39 *COD* 27–28 (Mansi III 560).
40 *COD* 28 (Mansi III 560). Errington (1997a) 62 notes that there may have been opposition to this move among the eastern bishops but they were in no position to object.
41 Errington (1997a) 62 – "This was a statement of faith in the long-term future of Constantinople as imperial residence, which no emperor since the founder Constantine himself had given." See Appendix 2 on page 161 for further discussion of the significance of Constantinople.
42 *CTh*. 16.1.3.
43 Errington (1997a) 64ff and Errington (1997b) 440ff.
44 *CTh*. 16.5.8.
45 Soc. 5.10. Whether this physical act of tearing up statements actually occurred should not worry us. Socrates is simply stating that the emperor would now accept no competing creeds to that he supported.
46 *CTh*. 16.11–13.
47 *CTh*. 16.5.15; 16.5.19 and 16.5.21–22.
48 Soz. 7.4; 7.22.
49 Ruf. *HE* 11.19.
50 Soc. 5.20; Soz. 7.22.
51 Soc. 5.10. See also Soc. 5.15 for Arians ejected in Antioch.
52 Soz. 7.22. See also Ruf. *HE* 11.19.
53 See Cameron (2010) 69ff for a full discussion.

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Part II

A dynasty founded; a dynasty challenged

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5 A new dynasty rises

By 383 Theodosius was well established in the east. He had neutralised the Gothic threat, resealed the Danubian border, and in doing so had created a new reservoir of military manpower. In addition, he had successfully ensconced himself in his new capital of Constantinople and had begun to build a substantive civil and military administration from both western figures and new supporters in the east. He had also re-organised the eastern church around the Nicene doctrine to give his regime yet another bulwark for its legitimacy.

In January of 383 Theodosius made an extremely aggressive statement of his political independence from the west by raising his six-year-old son Arcadius to the position of co-emperor in the east. He took this step unilaterally and without the approval of Gratian, who was nominally his senior Augustus. The eastern mints of Theodosius quickly began producing coinage exalting the new Augustus with reverse legends such as VICTORIA AUGUSTORUM and GLORIA RO-MANORUM.[1] Theodosius presented Arcadius' accession as a seamless addition to the imperial college with the legend CONCORDI-A AVGGG (that celebrated the harmonious relationship between himself, Gratian, and Valentinian II) simply becoming CONCORDI-A AVGGGG to include Arcadius (see Figure 5.1). Gratian however was clearly displeased by this development as his coinage studiously ignores Arcadius' accession.[2]

Theodosius' decision to raise his son to the rank of Augustus was nothing short of a public declaration of complete independence from the authority of the man who had made him emperor. If Gratian had harboured any illusions about somehow returning control of the east to his family, they were now extinguished. The timing of Theodosius' announcement is telling. It came only months after he had reached a peace agreement with the Goths, a milestone that considerably strengthened his internal political position. Theodosius had managed to fulfil the mandate that made him emperor in the first place: the ability to solve the Gothic crisis. He was now free to flex his dynastic muscles. A panegyric delivered only weeks before Arcadius' accession by Themistius to celebrate the consulship of Saturninus signals this shift in power. Gratian, who in previous panegyrics had been presented as wise in his decision to pick Theodosius as emperor, and as a worthy partner in imperial power, was now reduced to a mere 'rubber stamp' in God's divine will. In addition, any role he

Figure 5.1 ARCADIUS (obv), DN ARCADI-VS PF AVG, rosette-diademed, draped, cuirassed bust right, (rev) CONCORDIA AVGGGG, Constantinople seated facing, looking right, right foot on prow, holding sceptre and globe (*RIC* IX: Constantinople n.46f)
Credit: With permission of wildwinds.com.

played in retrieving the Gothic situation is completely ignored. All credit was now given to Theodosius.[3] This speech reflects Theodosius' political calculations. With the Gothic situation under control, he no longer needed to rely on western assistance and could afford to aggressively pursue an independent political and dynastic agenda.

Theodosius chose to raise Arcadius to the purple on the occasion of his own *quinquinnalia* (19 January 383) in order to demonstrate that he had earned the right, by his tenure and achievements, to appoint a successor and colleague. Also significant was his decision to make his son Augustus as opposed to giving him the subordinate rank of Caesar.[4] The move mimicked the innovation introduced by the House of Valentinian, where both Gratian and Valentinian II were raised directly to the rank of Augustus without first having held the rank of Caesar. This was yet another way that Theodosius was able to express that he alone held the authority and legitimacy to decide the political future of the east. Arcadius was not the only member of the imperial family to receive a new title around this time. Theodosius' wife Aelia Flaccilla begins to appear on coinage with the rare title of *Augusta*, which in and of itself added to Theodosius' brazen declaration of independence from the west.[5]

Theodosius clearly saw a future for himself and his heirs free of western interference but knew he had to assure his subjects that Arcadius was a worthy addition to the dynasty. These efforts began in Themistius' panegyric delivered just before Arcadius' formal accession to power. In it he foreshadows Arcadius' rise to the purple by comparing him to a young Alexander – someone who was destined to achieve great things. He goes on to note that the emperor would be justified in giving his son the consulship and that Arcadius was "already a young man, already perfect in speech, soon able to address the multitude". In short – the son was ready for power should Theodosius raise him to imperial rank.[6] In the same speech, Themistius offers yet another indication that

Theodosius was now setting his own political course, when he offers an oblique yet noticeable criticism of the western emperor by favourably comparing Theodosius' decision not to take the consulship (or for that matter give it to Arcadius) with past practice by emperors from the House of Valentinian.[7] The implicit message was that Theodosius would do what was best for the empire – not his own family. In reality though, Theodosius' decision not to keep the consulship of 383 in his own family was hardly altruistic. Instead, at a time when he was publicly breaking from the west, it was designed to bolster his relationship with an important figure from the eastern military establishment. By honouring a leading general in Saturninus with the consulship, Theodosius was not only strengthening his loyalty to the regime but was signalling to other leading generals that their continued loyalty could one day too be similarly rewarded.[8]

A western threat

As it transpired, Theodosius did not have to concern himself for long with Gratian's attitude towards his declaration of independence. In early 383, longstanding discontent within the western army about the young emperor's rule finally boiled over when rebellion broke out in Britain. The troops stationed there acclaimed an experienced Spanish officer named Magnus Maximus as Augustus.[9] Maximus quickly crossed the Channel into Gaul, where he received the loyalty of the armies stationed along the Rhine. Gratian had been in Northern Italy when the revolt broke out and hurried northwards with his army until he came face to face with the usurper just outside of Paris. Initial skirmishes between the two forces proved inconclusive, but after five days, Magnus Maximus' superior military reputation proved irresistible and Gratian's forces started to desert. The first unit to change sides were a group of Moorish cavalry (*equites mauri*), after which the floodgates opened, possibly due to the desertion of Gratian's leading general Merobaudes. Gratian had no option but to flee with the last troops available to him – a group of Alan bodyguards. The hapless emperor did not get far. Magnus Maximus sent his Master of Cavalry Andragathius after Gratian, who was subsequently hunted down and killed at Lyon on 25 August 383.[10]

Theodosius and Valentinian II were now faced with an extremely different political calculation to that they faced under Gratian. For Valentinian II, the threat was immediate, as he was essentially helpless in the face of the new power in the west. Since being raised to power in 375 and grudgingly accepted by his half-brother Gratian, he had been nominally put in charge of North Africa, Italy and Illyricum, although there is no evidence that a formal division of territory ever took place. Instead it was more likely that he was nothing more than a useful symbolic prop for the regime, and thus kept close to Rome and its restive Senate.[11] His power had relied totally on Gratian's patronage and, despite his dynastic prestige he simply did not have the authority, or frankly the credibility, to confront the battle-hardened forces of Magnus

Maximus. As Socrates notes, Valentinian had no choice but to acquiesce and "most unwillingly, but constrained by the necessity of the time, admitted Maximus as his colleague in the empire".[12] Magnus Maximus of course treated him as a child rather than as a colleague, refusing to acknowledge him as emperor on his coinage and demanding that he physically come to him as a "son to his father". The young emperor would never be truly accepted as a colleague by Magnus Maximus and all Valentinian II and his supporters could do was to attempt to forestall an immediate invasion of his territory. They were able to do this by sending Ambrose of Milan to Gaul to negotiate with the usurper. While Ambrose (perhaps deliberately stalling for time) argued that the young emperor could not travel over the Alps in winter to meet with Maximus, Valentinian's loyal general Bauto sealed the mountain crossings from Gaul into Africa. Magnus Maximus was infuriated when he learned of this but for now was forced to leave Valentinian II in place.[13]

Unlike Valentinian II, Theodosius was in no immediate danger from the usurper. But he still had to walk a fine line, given the relative youth of his own regime and the radically new power dynamic created by the usurpation. Despite some early posturing, including refusing to acknowledge Magnus Maximus' first consulship, Theodosius made no immediate moves against the usurper and would eventually (albeit temporarily) recognise his regime.[14] We know little about the negotiating process by which this occurred, beyond that an initial embassy was sent to Constantinople by Magnus Maximus who "made arrogant demands", and did not seek pardon but only "peace and alliance" with the threat of war if these demands were not met.[15] It has also been suggested that Theodosius went to Verona in August of 384 to confer with Valentinian II, although there is no real evidence that this meeting took place.[16] We can only guess that Theodosius was prepared to accept a temporary period of peace as long as Magnus Maximus was content to remain in the western territories of Gaul, Spain, and Britain, and not cross into Valentinian II's territory, which now served as a vital buffer zone between two wary, would-be protagonists.

Theodosius' acceptance, or at least seeming acceptance, of the usurpation of Magnus Maximus, is difficult to understand in the light of his own dynastic ambitions. One influential theory holds that Theodosius was not as hostile to Maximus as one would automatically assume. Two reasons have been proffered. First is that he must have held lingering resentments towards the House of Valentinian due to the fate of his father. Second, and infinitely more persuasive, is that Theodosius saw Magnus Maximus as a potential ally because of their shared Spanish origins. Some go as far as to suggest that Theodosius and Magnus Maximus served together under Theodosius the Elder in both Britain and North Africa and may have even been distantly related. In a panegyric delivered a year after Magnus Maximus' defeat, the orator felt obliged to confront the issue of a purported 'shared heritage' saying that the usurper was a "purple-clad butcher who was boasting both of his kinship with you, and of your goodwill". Elsewhere in the same address he says Maximus was "once the most delinquent little slave in your household".[17] It's noticeable that within this vicious invective there is no

outright denial of a shared history, if not a shared heritage. The two powerbrokers were also co-religionists. As we have seen, Theodosius had engineered a Nicene revolution in the east but Magnus Maximus was no less committed to the Nicene cause and launched a bloody persecution of Priscillian and his followers in the west.[18] Theodoret highlights this link by claiming that Magnus Maximus wrote to Valentinian II beseeching him to stop his war against the true faith and blaming the latter's adherence to his mother's Arianism as the reason for his quick defeat when Magnus Maximus successfully invaded Italy in 387. He also claims that Theodosius subsequently wrote to Valentinian II noting that Magnus Maximus was indeed a pious ruler.[19] Even if we accept that Theodosius and Magnus Maximus had some sort of shared history and were co-religionists, these factors are not enough to explain why Theodosius did not immediately move to silence the threat that the usurper represented to his own ambitious dynastic plans. Most obviously, he could have immediately proclaimed himself the avenger of Gratian and gone to war 'on behalf' of Valentinian II: yet he chose silence and a lengthy acquiescence to a dangerous competitor.

The only answer for this is that Theodosius had calculated that he was not yet strong enough to challenge the usurper. He had only just dealt with the Gothic threat and still faced ongoing pressures on the Danubian frontier. In addition, he needed to solve the ongoing threat that Sassanid Persia posed to the eastern frontier of his territory (see below). Of course, that doesn't mean that Theodosius hadn't immediately judged Magnus Maximus to be an unacceptable threat that would one day need to be vanquished. Where Gratian (and by extension Valentinian II) were known quantities and represented no immediate threat to his dynastic position in the east, he could not be sure that Magnus Maximus would be as docile. Zosimus claims that despite initially acknowledging Magnus Maximus, Theodosius secretly began to plan for war. This is likely true given the potential threat Maximus represented to his new regime. But as long as Valentinian II's administration formed a territorial buffer with the domain of Magnus Maximus, Theodosius could afford to slowly build his strength for an inevitable confrontation.

In the meantime, he played a delicate game. To assuage demands of vengeance from partisans of the House of Valentinian, he made a show of planning an expedition to the Rhine although this idea was quickly dropped with Themistius forced to defend the emperor's about face.[20] Instead, Theodosius made a public show of co-existing with Magnus Maximus. Coinage bearing the usurper's likeness was minted in Constantinople (see Figure 5.2) and sometime between 384 and 386 he instructed his Praetorian Prefect of the East Cynegius to carry the likeness of Magnus Maximus on a visit to Alexandria. In 386, Theodosius also acknowledged Flavius Euodius, Magnus Maximus' Praetorian Prefect, as Consul along with his own infant son Honorius.[21] At the same time however, Theodosius buttressed his own position in the west by providing key advisors to Valentinan's regime including Flavius Neoterius as Praetorian Prefect of Italy, and as we'll see below Gildo as Count of Africa (*comes africae*).

Figure 5.2 MAGNUS MAXIMUS, (obv) D N MAXIMVS P F AVS (sic), laurel and rosette-diademed, draped and cuirassed bust right, (rev) CONCORDI-A AVGGGG Constantinople, helmeted, seated facing, head right, right foot on prow, holding sceptre in left hand, globe in right, lion's heads on throne. (Cohen 2)
Credit: With permission of wildwinds.com, ex Triton V Sale, lot 2202, Jan 2002.

Although Theodosius worked to assist his fellow Augustus, it was not because he saw him as an equal colleague or believed that he was the rightful western Augustus. Instead, like Gratian, he viewed Valentinian II as his ward, and the territory he ruled as potential additions to his own domain. We see this attitude on coin issues made in Valentinian's name from a number of eastern mints. To demonstrate that Valentinian II was subservient to himself, he ensured that coinage from the eastern mints bearing the young emperor's name contained the same 'unbroken' style of obverse legend found on his son Arcadius' coinage as opposed to the conventional 'broken' obverse legend used by ruling emperors and found on his own coinage.[22] In September 384 Theodosius had a new factor to consider in his long-term dynastic planning: the birth of his second son Honorius. Now, with a potential second heir available to strengthen his dynasty, Theodosius could cast his eyes even further afield, meaning that his dealings with both Valentinian II and Magnus Maximus took on a new tone. The former was now more disposable to Theodosius' future plans than ever before, while the threat that the latter posed to his growing dynasty was brought into ever sharpening relief.[23]

Stabilising the east

Before Theodosius could move against Magnus Maximus he needed to ensure that the frontiers of his own territory were completely secure. The main area of concern was of course the Danubian frontier but with the agreement of 382 in place, a huge measure of security had been returned to that formerly chaotic frontier. The next few years were relatively calm, with only one substantial threat. This came in 386, from a group of Greuthungi who sought to cross the Danube. Their fate shows the short-term effectiveness of the agreement. Using Gothic troops serving in his ranks, Promotus, the Master of

Soldiers, cunningly drew the would-be invaders into making a risky night-time attack across the river which was met by a co-ordinated response of land and sea forces. According to Zosimus, the slaughter was extensive, with the "the whole flower of the barbarian army destroyed". Theodosius was then able to enrol the survivors into his army, further bolstering it for the eventual confrontation with Magnus Maximus. He had not only effectively sealed the Danube but had been able to use newly recruited Goths to engineer a devastating ambush.[24] So far, the loyalty of the defeated Goths was holding strong and Theodosius could turn to other frontiers of his domain.

The extensive eastern frontier of Theodosius' empire had been uncharacteristically calm for the first years of his rule. This frontier had long been a source of constant concern for Rome, as it bordered Sassanid Persia, the only other organised State powerful enough to challenge the empire. In the century prior to his reign, power had see-sawed between the two protagonists. In the late third century, Carus and Galerius had launched full-scale invasions of Sassanid territory, while in the mid-fourth century Constantius II was forced into a cautious defensive crouch in the face of the powerful Persian king Shapur II. His successor Julian took a far more aggressive attitude towards the Sassanians and in 363 launched a major invasion that reached their capital of Ctesiphon before ending in an ignominious retreat and the emperor's death. Somewhat ironically, it was this failure that provided Theodosius with a much-needed status quo in the east. In the wake of Julian's disastrous Persian campaign, his successor Jovian signed a treaty under which Rome lost five provinces east of the Tigris river, and a range of crucial fortresses in eastern Mesopotamia, including Nisibis and Singara.[25] Despite the ongoing humiliation felt by Rome, this treaty had the effect of creating a stable eastern frontier that "ran north of the Euphrates along the Chabur, then just west of the Mygdonis over the Mons Massius to the Tigris and finally along the Nymphius into the Taurus mountains".[26]

When Valens became emperor in 364, his only real concern in the east, aside from having to deal with some minor disturbances from Saracen tribes, was the status of the kingdom of Armenia. Under the terms of the treaty of 363, Rome's ability to intervene in Armenian affairs was formally curtailed – although our sources are contradictory on just what these restraints were.[27] While Valens would spend much time in the east jostling with Shapur over Armenia, the conflict remained essentially localised and Rome never faced anything near a full-scale invasion. When the growing Gothic crisis forced Valens to leave the east in 377, he did not leave Theodosius with any immediate problems. At worst, Rome and Persia were now in stalemate, with neither power absolutely able to dominate the kingdom. Some sources even declare that stability had been achieved via a tentative agreement to divide the client state.[28]

Despite Theodosius being in no shape to regain any of Rome's lost territories in the east, our sources predictably paint his relationship with Persia in the traditional terms of a subservient Persian king keen to avoid the wrath of an all-powerful Roman emperor. Orosius notes that the Persians "humbly

sent ambassadors of their own free will to Theodosius at Constantinople to seek peace".[29] Libanius talks of the Persians "thanking their lucky stars as they scurry to the security afforded by peace". Pacatus claims

> Persia herself, once a rival to our State and notorious for the deaths of so many Roman leaders, makes amends by her obedience for whatever atrocities she has perpetrated upon our princes. Finally, her king himself, who once disdained to concede he was a man, now confesses his fear and worships you in those very temples in which he is worshipped. [30]
>
> (trans. Nixon)

The truth however is far more nuanced. Given the weaknesses of Theodosius' position, both at the beginning of his reign, and during the periods where he faced significant internal threats, one would have expected Persia to take advantage of the situation by building on the territorial gains they made in the preceding decades. However, luckily for Theodosius, Persia had its own significant internal political problems. Shapur II died in 379, which immediately precluded a full-scale assault on Rome's eastern border while the new emperor was subsumed in the Danubian crisis. In the decade that followed, Persia had no fewer than three rulers (Ardashir II, Shapur III and Varahram IV), all of whom faced their own internal disturbances.[31] Thus the story of Persian-Roman relations in the reign of Theodosius was necessarily one of diplomacy rather than force.

We can securely record at least six embassies between Rome and Persia during Theodosius' reign.[32] Despite the pro-Roman slant of our sources we do not know which side instigated this ongoing exchange.[33] Most likely, negotiation was preferable to war for both Rome and Persia. And it was this approach that eventually resolved the final sticking point of the status of Armenia. In the mid-380s, probably in 387, an agreement was reached about which we know very little beyond that it dictated spheres of influence for both Rome and Persia.[34] It is unlikely that this agreement laid down a formal geographical line of division within Armenia. Instead Rome and Persia agreed that the country would be ruled by two kings – a pro-Roman king in the west, and a pro-Persian counterpart in the east.[35] Although the Greek and Latin sources say otherwise, the Roman sphere of influence was significantly smaller than that of the Persians – reflecting the fact that Rome had still not recovered its authority in the region after the disastrous events of 363. Given the timing of the final agreement, it is also possible that Theodosius was prepared to give ground to the Sassanians in the negotiations to ensure he was free to face Magnus Maximus. Whatever the case, the agreement could still be presented as a triumph of sorts for Theodosius because of the stability it brought. Pacatus was correct when he noted that the agreement allowed the emperor to "act abroad with freedom of mind by removing all anxiety and cause for suspicion at home". Indeed, compared with the ongoing problems on the Danube and in the west, the treaty would prove to be a valuable achievement

that did indeed usher in a long period of relative calm on what had a fractious frontier for both Rome and Persia.[36] Apart from the Armenian dispute, and a short-lived revolt by Tanukhid federates sometime in the early 380s, the eastern frontier remained exceedingly quiet throughout Theodosius' reign. This significantly aided his efforts on other frontiers as he was not only free to turn his full attention to the west but could also safely withdraw troops from the eastern edges of the empire to assist in his campaigns.[37]

North Africa was also an important sphere of influence for Theodosius. It was geographically crucial for any campaign westwards against Magnus Maximus as it represented an exposed flank for both sides and offered easy access into the imperial heartland of Italy. As with the eastern frontier, Theodosius benefited from recent history when it came to North Africa. Under the orders of Valentinian I, his father Theodosius the Elder had ruthlessly exterminated the revolt of Firmus in 375. The desert tribes of the south, some of whom had supported the rebel, were clearly in no mood to provoke another major imperial expedition. As eastern Augustus he was of course not responsible for the entire theatre but he did have oversight of the provinces of Cyrene and Egypt. In particular Theodosius recognised the importance of Egypt, and in 380 established a separate diocese of Egypt under the command of a *praefectus augustalis*.

Along with this administrative move, the most consequential action Theodosius made on the North African frontier was organising for Gildo to be appointed as Count of Africa by Valentinian II. Despite being nominally handed the position by Valentinian II, who had formal responsibility for much of North Africa, Gildo was clearly Theodosius' man. His appointment speaks to the influence the eastern emperor had at the court of the young emperor, who now relied on his eastern colleague for support against Magnus Maximus. The North African commander had strong links to the family of Theodosius. He had fought under Theodosius the Elder against his own brother Firmus and during the campaign had been entrusted with a number of key tasks. Theodosius clearly saw him as a partisan supporter who would be very useful when he moved against Magnus Maximus. With Gildo in place, Theodosius could hope to secure grain-rich North Africa and would have the option to maybe even open a new front against the western usurper. Gildo's much later decision to rebel against Honorius has inevitably coloured our sources' opinion of him, but he must have remained loyal to Theodosius during the campaign against Magnus Maximus as the emperor subsequently approved the marriage of Gildo's daughter, Salvina, to Nebridius, a nephew of his first wife Flaccilla.[38] By 393 he was the most senior military commander in North Africa, a role he maintained right up until Theodosius' death. Even if Salvina was effectively a hostage (as some have claimed) it seems that Theodosius' strategy was effective in maintaining his forced loyalty.[39]

The 'Riot of the Statues'

Stable frontiers were not the only prerequisite for Theodosius to move against the western usurper. He needed to ensure that his army was strengthened and

that he had the finances to fund a significant campaign. While the immediate negative effects of the Gothic wars had ceased, the emperor faced an ongoing economic deficit thanks to the disruption caused to key areas of his taxation base. Theodosius responded in the only way he could – by increasing taxes – particularly in areas that had been unaffected by the Gothic incursions.[40] Theodosius reaped the rewards of this policy when anti-tax riots broke out in the major eastern city of Antioch. We are extremely well informed about this episode via the writings of two first hand witnesses, the pagan statesman and orator Libanius and the Christian writer John Chrysostom.[41]

Early in 387, an imperial announcement was read publicly outside the council chambers (*dikasterion*) at Antioch imposing an additional tax burden on the city. There has been much debate about exactly which tax caused the discontent. Most likely it was either the *aurum coronarium*, a tax connected to imperial anniversaries or the *lustralis collatio*, a tax on traders. Given that both Theodosius' *decennalia* and the *quinquinnalia* of Arcadius were upcoming, the former tax was most likely. This was Libanius' view, who noted that "The emperor needed money for the maintenance of the empire, especially since his reign was approaching its tenth anniversary and his son's its fifth" [42] (trans. Norman). The city had already suffered through a number of grain shortages and there had been previous popular disturbances, most recently at the nearby settlement of Berytus. The taxation announcement had an immediate effect. A crowd led by members of the local council (*curiales*) first went to the Governor to ask that the burden be rescinded before moving on to the home of the bishop Flavianus.[43] Finding that the bishop wasn't there, or more likely had made himself scarce, the crowd returned to the *dikasterion*, where they began to riot. Hanging lamps were cut down in front of a nearby bath before the mob attacked and tore down bronze statues of the emperor and his family.[44] Finally, troops arrived to quell the rioters and the crowds dispersed. The whole incident was over by midday and had only stretched for a few hours. But despite this, the riot had taken on a potentially deadly significance: by attacking statues of the emperor and his family, the rioters had directly challenged the *auctoritas* of the emperor. When local authorities sent couriers to Constantinople with news of the riot, the entire city shook with fear, expecting a brutal imperial reprisal. In the interim, the Count of the East executed some of the ringleaders, while many citizens either took the chance to flee or gathered in local churches.[45] On 15 March the emperor's representatives, the Master of Soldiers, Ellebichus and the Master of Offices, Flavius Caesarius, arrived in Antioch. They did not unleash the massacre feared by the city, but they did hand down a number of severe penalties – including arrests and imprisonment of leading councillors; land seizures; the closure of theatres, baths and horse races; and finally a cessation of imperial food distributions. Most humiliating though was the decision to place Antioch under the jurisdiction of its long-time rival Laodicea.[46]

The citizens of Antioch immediately sent an embassy to Constantinople seeking clemency. To undertake this mission, they made a shrewd choice – the

bishop Flavianus, who was a key ecclesiastical ally of the emperor. The bishop's mission was evidently a stunning success. Sozomen claims that he played on Theodosius' sense of compassion by arranging for young men to serenade the wrathful emperor with psalms, who was so moved that he revoked the punishments he had previously ordered. Libanius, who erroneously claims credit for the imperial reprieve, describes this decision as "a despatch that arrived with a light that banished the darkness".[47] The success of Flavianus' mission has been rightly hailed as an important example of the growing secular role being played by Christian bishops, who used their influence with emperors like Theodosius to achieve positive outcomes for their local communities.[48] Less discussed, however, are the important geopolitical calculations that must have informed the emperor's decision-making in all stages of this episode.

Despite claims in our sources that Theodosius reacted to the disturbances at Antioch with a furious rage that led him to "avenge this insult by the death of many of the citizens", it is clear that Theodosius' response was very calculated. The initial punishment handed down could have been far more indiscriminately violent, but the emperor knew he could not afford to ignite a major conflagration in such an important administrative centre at the same time as he was planning a war against Magnus Maximus. Additionally, there was already discontent across the east due to the financial pressures he was placing on the region to fund the upcoming civil war.[49] In many ways, how he dealt with Antioch would have ramifications across his domain. The initial punishment he inflicted on the city was clearly designed to warn off any other urban centres in the east from allowing similar disturbances that would derail the emperor's economic preparations for war. While we cannot assume that the emperor was always going to issue a corrective pardon to the inevitable plea from Antioch, his decision to do so at the request of Flavianus was politically cunning. Theodosius could not afford to leave a major centre like Antioch permanently crippled, even if in the short term his actions would serve to warn off future outbreaks of civil unrest. Thus, when Flavianus appeared at court to argue Antioch's case, it was to Theodosius' benefit. In handing down a stern but measured set of punishments, he had shown that imperial authority was not to be questioned. Now he could show a politically convenient mercy to the city without appearing weak. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that Theodosius was not handing Flavianus a victory because he needed to appease the church.[50] Instead, Flavianus success should be seen as emblematic of the critical role the new Nicene church of the east was playing in maintaining the legitimacy of the regime. During the riots, the population of Antioch had tried to approach Flavianus to stop the tax rises because they knew he had been appointed by the emperor. Likewise, he was sent to Theodosius because he was perceived to have influence with the emperor. Bishops like Flavianus were now de facto authority figures for the regime and the church itself served as a useful additional institution in the governing apparatus of the east.

Notes

1 VICTORIA AUGUSTORUM – *RIC* IX: Constantinople, n. 50 (c); GLORIA RO-MANORUM – *RIC* IX: Constantinople, n. 53 (a) and (b).
2 CONCORDI-A AVGGG – *RIC* IX: Constantinople, n. 46 (a–g); CONCORDI-A AVGGGG 47 (c–d). See also *RIC* IX xix–xxi.
3 Them. *Or.* 16.207b "God summons to leadership the only man capable of resisting such an inundation of misfortune; while Gratian proclaims the decision from on high."
4 Heather & Moncur (2001) 257. For the accession of Arcadius see also Soz. 7.12.2; Soc. 5.10.5; Philostorgius 10.5. *Chron. Pasch*. a.383 places the location of the accession as the Hebdomon in Constantinople.
5 Holum (1982) 29–44. The standard obverse legend for Flaccilla was AEL FLAC-CILLA AVG – see *RIC* IX p. 317.
6 Them. *Or.* 16.204c–d.
7 Them. *Or.* 16.204c "It was possible to advance him in your stead, as has been the custom of past and recent emperors who placed the purple-edged toga on their sons before the full imperial purple, as if in prelude to their future reign." Here Themistius is clearly referring to Valentinian II and Varronianus the son of Jovian. On this criticism see Heather & Moncur (2001) 256–257.
8 See Lee (2015) for the range of honours emperors could bestow upon leading generals.
9 On the usurpation of Magnus Maximus see *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).23.3 and 38.2; Zos. 4.35.3–4; *Epit. Caes.* 47; Orosius 7.34.9; Soc. 5.11.2 and Soz. 7.13.1. For discussion of the usurpation see Birley (1983) 14; Nixon & Rodgers (1994) 476, fn. 76 and 477, fn. 78. See also Palanque (1965) 255–256 and Paschoud (2003) 412–413.
10 See Zos. 4.35.5–6; *Epit. Caes.* 47.6–7 and Soz. 5.11. See also Paschoud (2003) 413–415 and Birley (1983) 24. On the possible role of Merobaudes in the victory of Maximus over Gratian see Prosper. *Epit. Chron.* a.384 and Rodgers (1981) 82–105.
11 McEvoy (2013) 62–64.
12 Soc. 5.11. See also Soz. 7.13.
13 Amb. *Ep.* 30 (24).6–8.
14 Bagnall (1987) 303.
15 Zos. 4.37.2.
16 Maraval (2009) 157; Palanque (1965) 258–259.
17 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).24.1 & and 31.1.
18 Birley (1983) provides a detailed discussion on this 'persecution'.
19 Theod. *HE* 5.15–16.
20 Them. *Or.* 18.220d–221a. We cannot be sure how far planning for such an expedition actually went. Baldus (1984) 186 connects coinage showing Theodosius on a boat with a planned expedition against Maximus.
21 Zos. 4.37. Coinage: VIRTUS E-XERCITI: *RIC* IX, Constantinople n.79 (d). Kent (1993) 82 notes coinage minted in the name of Maximus at Constantinople carrying the reverse legend CONCORDIA AUGGGG. He believes this shows genuine recognition of Maximus by Theodosius. Very few examples of this coinage have survived and it is possible that it was never actually released, released in very limited quantities or even recalled and destroyed – see Burns (1994) 93.
22 Croke (1976) 236–237 including fns. 3–6.
23 While Honorius was not immediately declared to be either Caesar or Augustus in 386 he received the title *nobilissimus puer* – see *CIL* 14, 231 and *AE* 1906, 86. He held the consulship in the same year – see Bagnall (1987) 306–307.
24 Zos. 4.38–39.
25 Amm. 25.7.4; Zosimus 3.31. Blockley (1992) 27–30.
26 Lenski (2002) 163.

27 Lenski (2002) 164 offers very useful discussion of this issue and how it is presented in a range of sources.
28 Blockley (1987) 229, fn. 30. Oddly, just before Theodosius became emperor, Gratian took the chance to interfere in the politics of the east by appointing a new *magister militum per Orientem* – Sapores, who seems to have survived in this position until 381– see *PLRE* 1, Sapores. Libanius *Ep.*957 demonstrates he was still alive as late as 390, although it is unsure what role if any he held by this stage.
29 Orosius 7.34.8. Similarly, *Epit. Caes.* 48.5 and Soc. 5.12 stress that it was the Persians who petitioned Theodosius for peace – see fn. 32 for further discussion.
30 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).22.2.
31 Blockley (1992) 42.
32 Blockley (1987) 230, fn. 32 lists these embassies.
33 The anonymous epitomator's claim (*Epit. Caes.* 48.5) that "when petitioned by the Persians, he concluded a peace" must be considered as simple pro Roman propaganda. Similar is Marcell. com. a.384.1 who claims that "Persian ambassadors came to Constantinople requesting peace from the emperor Theodosius. Marcellinus continues with this theme at 385 saying that 'The emperor Theodosius subjected several eastern nations to his own empire through his ambassadors." Further spin is found at *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).22.5 and Soc. 5.12.2, which focus on the lavish gifts of gems, silks and elephants one Persian ambassador supposedly brought to Constantinople on behalf of a Persian king fearful of the mighty Roman emperor Theodosius. In reality, there were an extensive set of embassies over a number of years that led to an eventual agreement. This highlights that neither side could afford a full-scale war – see Blockley (1987) 230, fn. 32.
34 Blockley (1992) 43 says that "everything about this agreement, including the date at which it was made, is uncertain".
35 Blockley (1992) 42–43.
36 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).32.2.
37 Which was easily dealt with by the *magister militum per orientem* Richomeres – see Blockley (1992) 42.
38 D. Woods (Theodosius I (AD 379–395), 1999, on: www.luc.edu/roman-emperors/theo1.htm (peer-reviewed essay) suggests that Gildo may have won a victory against Maximus in Sicily. However, I agree with Wijnendaele (2017) 4 that this is very unlikely. Between 386–398 Gildo held the title *comes et magister utriusque militae.*
39 Claud. *de bello Gild*. 251–257. Claims made by Claudian that Gildo betrayed Theodosius in his conflict with Eugenius can only be polemic coloured by the former's revolt against Honorius.
40 Theod. *HE* 5.19.1 and Soz. 7.23.1 both directly acknowledge military need as the reason for taxation increases. See also Joh. Chrys. *Hom. ad pop. Ant* 3.7; 5.3; 8.4. Zos. 4.41.1 puts the increases down to Theodosius' spendthrift ways. Here the Christian accounts are clearly more accurate. This episode came on the heels of a period of discontent due in part to a shortage of grain – see Maraval (2009) 187.
41 Primarily in Lib. *Or*. 19–23 and Joh. Chrys. *Hom. ad pop. Ant*. French (1998) 469f discusses some of the problems with this evidence. One wonders whether Theodosius' failure to visit the city contributed to the riots? Clearly the citizens of Antioch felt little connection with the imperial family.
42 Libanius *Or.* 22.4. Browning (1952) 14ff. See also Lib. *Or.* 46.22–3
43 The *curiales* were responsible for collecting taxes so it is not surprising that they led the 'resistance' in this instance. During the fourth century serving on city councils became very unpopular due as *curiales* had to ensure the imperial purse received the amount of revenue it anticipated. They were expected to make up shortfalls themselves. On the decline of this class see page 10, note 22 in the

current study. Theodosius issued many laws during his reign, particularly in the east, trying to reverse this trend – see Errington (2006) 104. Maraval (2009) 332, fn. 37 believes that one law in particular, *CTh*. 12.6.20 which demanded that tax collectors be confirmed in front of a public audience, was partly to blame for the revolt at Antioch.

44 Lib. *Or*. 22.5–9 gives the narrative of the riot. In both *Or*. 22.8 and *Or*. 20.4 Libanius says that the statues attacked were of Theodosius, Flaccilla, Arcadius, Honorius and Theodosius the elder. Theod. *HE* 5.19 specifically names a statue of Flaccilla while Soz. 7.23 says the statues were of the emperor and empress. Browning (1952) 20, fn. 79–80 notes that other writers considered insults to the statues to be insults to the emperor himself.

45 Lib. *Or*. 19.36; 23.17; 22.11; Joh. Chrys. *Hom. ad pop. Ant.* 3.6; 16.1 and 5.

46 Theod. *HE* 5.19; Lib. *Or*. 20. 5–6.

47 Soz. 7.23.3 "It is said that the humanity of the emperor was excited; he was overcome by pity at once; his wrath was subdued, and as his heart yearned over the city, he shed tears on the cup which he held in his hand." Lib. *Or*. 20.7 – Zos. 4.41.1 erroneously supports Libanius' claims. It is perhaps this case that inspired *Epit. Caes*. 48.13 to say "He was, of course, enraged by unbecoming acts, but was quickly placated, because of which harsh measures were sometimes mollified as the result of a slight delay" (trans. Banchich).

48 Brown (1992) 105–109 and 151–152 and Hunt (1998) 269ff.

49 Lib. *Or*. 19.4 mentions 'pro-Maximian' outbreaks in Alexandria. There had also been disturbances in towns such as Berytus, Lib. *Or*. 19.28. Zos. 4.27–29 details general discontent with Theodosius' military expenditure.

50 Joh. Chrys. *Hom. ad pop. Ant.* 17.5. claims that local monks intervened on the side of the people of Antioch and successfully influenced them to tell the emperor that the riot had been caused not by the populace but by vagabonds and outsiders. We can dismiss this highly dubious claim.

6 An inevitable clash

In the summer of 387, the fragile peace that had held for four years between the usurper and Valentinian II suddenly broke when Magnus Maximus' battle-hardened forces launched a sudden attack on Italy via the Cottian Alps. Fortuitously for Valentinian II, when news of the invasion reached him, he was at the city of Aquileia and was able to immediately flee the short distance to Thessalonica and the protection of Theodosius.[1]

We cannot be sure why Magnus Maximus chose this particular time to make his strike but it was always going to come as he was never going to allow Valentinian II to survive as his co-emperor and his patience with the status quo was limited. After returning from a diplomatic mission to Magnus Maximus, Ambrose once wrote to Valentinian to be on his "guard against a man concealing war under a wrapping of peace". It was a point well made.[2] Most likely Magnus Maximus simply judged himself strong enough to prevail. He may have also heard about Theodosius' covert preparations for war and decided to launch a pre-emptive strike to cement his strategic geographical position.[3]

The activities of Valentinian's mother Justina in trying to impose her Arian beliefs on the city of Milan, and the high-profile response this provoked from Ambrose, may have also provided Magnus Maximus with the perfect cover to mask his intentions. Rufinus says that

> Maximus, eager to rid himself of the stigma of usurpation and to show himself a legitimate ruler, declared in a letter he sent that what she was attempting was impious and that the faith of God was being attacked and the laws of the Catholic Church destroyed; at the same time he began to move toward Italy.
>
> (trans. Amidon)

It would be easy to put this claim down to Rufinus' anti-Arian viewpoint, but the letter he mentions actually survives.[4]

Magnus Maximus' failure to capture Valentinian II during his invasion was to cost him politically. When Valentinian fled directly to Thessalonica to seek the protection of the eastern emperor, Theodosius was gifted his *casus belli*.[5]

That Valentinian did not hesitate in seeking sanctuary in the east confirms the existing close relationship between the two courts, and somewhat ironically, validates Magnus Maximus' complaints on the issue. As for the usurper himself, he was well-received in Italy, with a number of prominent senatorial figures not only rallying to his cause but agreeing to fill important positions in his regime. Symmachus even delivered a panegyric dedicated to his new emperor, something he would live to regret.[6]

In the east, despite the political winds blowing strongly in his favour, Theodosius reacted with typical caution. He did not summon the fugitives to Constantinople or make any immediate preparations for war. Zosimus predictably claims that this inaction stemmed from shock and an unwillingness to abandon an 'indulgent' lifestyle. But in reality the eastern emperor was still in a precarious position. Although Theodosius had successfully calmed both the Danubian and eastern frontiers, he was still in the process of rebuilding an army capable of launching a full-scale assault on the west. However, he knew that he had to act. Magnus Maximus had not only seized strategically sensitive neighbouring territory; he had also made a political statement about his future plans by declaring his son Victor as co-emperor.[7]

Previously, Magnus Maximus as Augustus in the west had represented a future threat. Now, Magnus Maximus as a next-door-neighbour with a declared heir was a clear and present danger to the survival of Theodosius' own dynasty. After an interval of some months, during which time Theodosius tested the appetite for war with leading supporters, he visited Thessalonica at the end of the summer of 387 to meet with Valentinian II. Our sources for this crucial meeting are particularly unsatisfactory and only serve to obscure the negotiations Theodosius actually had with Valentinian II and his mother. Our main narrative is provided by Zosimus, who spins an unlikely tale that Justina manipulated Theodosius into war by offering the lovestruck emperor her and Valentinian I's daughter Galla in marriage on the condition that he avenge the death of Gratian. Just as suspect are the narratives of Rufinus and Theodoret, who cast the decision to go to war as a case of religious zeal, with Theodosius seeking to turn Valentinian II from his Arian heresy and return him to his former domain as a pious Nicene ruler.[8]

It's best then to judge what happened during this meeting, by its known outcomes and the political considerations that Theodosius faced at the time. Theodosius did indeed marry Galla, not out of unrequited lust but for political gain. The eastern emperor had lost his first wife Aelia Flaccilla in 386 (as well as his daughter Pulcheria) and was able to use this situation to cleverly manipulate a desperate young emperor and his advisors.[9] With Galla as his consort, Theodosius could portray himself as the legitimate heir of the Valentinian I as well as retrospectively legitimise his unilateral decision to raise Arcadius as his co-emperor. Later Christian and pagan sources present Theodosius as both a member and the defender of the traditional ruling dynasty of the west, suggesting that the regime did indeed propagate such a theme as the official party line.[10] Subsequent Theodosian propaganda would

claim that Theodosius was still prepared to pardon Magnus Maximus after the invasion of Italy, but in reality the die had now been cast. Theodosius' preparations for war may have been deliberately slow, but they were determined.[11]

In January of 388 Theodosius celebrated his *decennalia*. This celebration usefully reinforced the emperor's endurance and successes while at the same time highlighting the comparative youth and inexperience of the 'senior' emperor Valentinian II, who had formally at least ruled for a longer period. Theodosius also took a number of concrete steps to secure his regime in the east ahead of what could be a lengthy western campaign. In March of 388 he appointed the pagan Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus as his new Praetorian Prefect, and his son Proculus as the Prefect of Constantinople. He also appointed a new *comes rei privatae* (Severinus) and made Eutychianus Count of the Sacred Largesses. His sons Arcadius and Honorius remained in Constantinople under the care of these key officials. The importance of such arrangements is driven home to us by an episode that occurred while Theodosius was on campaign. A false rumour of his defeat at the hands of Magnus Maximus swept the city, which resulted in riots led by the dispossessed Arian faction in the city. That this discord seems to have been quickly snubbed out shows the efficacy of Theodosius' arrangements for the home front while on campaign.[12]

Theodosius remained stretched financially. In his absence from Constantinople between 388 and 391, no gold coinage was struck in the capital, suggesting gold reserves were either very low, or that what gold the emperor had, travelled with him.[13] Much of his available currency was no doubt dedicated to the army, and here Theodosius worked feverishly to ready an invasion force. These preparations reveal a continuing fragility in the eastern army a full decade after Adrianople.[14] Theodosius was now heavily reliant on barbarian soldiers who had agreed to serve the empire as part of the agreement of 382. Some of those who would march westwards had as recently as 386 been trying to attack the empire. While these forces, who Pacatus proudly tells us contained troops "from all the Scythian nations" (later in his address he specifically mentions Goths, Huns, Iberians; Isaurians and Alans), were now fulfilling their duty under agreements made with Theodosius, their loyalty remained dubious. Magnus Maximus was keenly aware of this weakness and attempted to suborn their loyalties with some success.[15]

The way Theodosius employed these barbarian troops in the campaign against Magnus Maximus is extremely important, as it not only casts light upon the terms of the agreement of 382 but also the vexed question of when Rome began to use so called federate troops (*foederati*), who served as tribal groups under their own commanders. It is clear from our sources that the barbarian troops who served as part of the expeditionary army did not serve in separate tribal groupings under their own tribal leaders. Zosimus talks of barbarians being enrolled among Rome's army, while Pacatus describes these same recruits as "fellow soldiers" (*commilitones*), which strongly suggests that the Goths served in a traditional fashion, with some forming new regular army units and others spread throughout existing units.[16] Pacatus also specifically notes that the new barbarian recruits marched under Roman leaders, whose identities are

actually known to us. Overall command of the expedition was nominally in the hands of Theodosius himself. But while the emperor was physically present, the day-to- day campaign was directed by proven commanders, the Master of Cavalry Promotus along with the Master of Infantry Timasius. They were assisted by Arbogast, the Frankish Master of Soldiers who had been serving Valentinian II, and the Master of Soldiers in the east, Richomeres.[17] Additionally, Theodosius still feared that his new barbarian troops would be disloyal, something Pacatus reminds us of when he says that the emperor "removed from the frontier forces of dubious loyalty" by including them in his expeditionary army. Given this ongoing fear, it is far more likely that Theodosius would ensure that the barbarians were led by Roman officers and subsumed within the traditional structures of the Roman army rather than being allowed to serve as a separate entity under their own commanders.[18]

Logistically, Theodosius had prepared brilliantly for the upcoming campaign and by June of 388 he was in a position to launch a multifaceted attack on the ill-prepared Magnus Maximus. Pacatus says that the emperor divided his forces into three parts to "upset the confidence of the enemy by multiplying his terror and cutting off his retreat by surrounding him". We are not exactly sure what Pacatus is referring to here. Apart from the emperor's main attack force that left from Thessalonica, we know only of a naval venture aimed at Sicily, which was most likely only designed to divert some of Magnus Maximus' troops from the north.[19] In this Theodosius was successful, as Magnus Maximus weakened his defences in the Julian Alps by sending Andragathius, arguably his most successful commander, to the Adriatic sea in a futile hunt for Theodosius' fleet.[20] Significantly, this diversion also gave Theodosius the excuse to minimise the role of Valentinian II in the campaign by making him the figurehead commander of the naval force. Theodosius could not risk his capture by Magnus Maximus, nor did he want him anywhere near the real campaign. Victory was to be Theodosius' alone.[21] Theodosius launched his main attack via Sirmium and then most probably followed the course of the Sava River. This unheralded and lightning fast attack proved extremely successful. His forces won an initial victory at Siscia (Siak) and then defeated a large force commanded by Magnus Maximus' brother Marcellinus at Poetovio (Ptuj). Afterwards he used the defeated troops of the usurper to reinforce his own ranks.[22] Despite suffering acute supply problems, Theodosius forged on and was able to bring the war to a stunning conclusion in August of 388, when his forces captured Magnus Maximus in the northern Italian city of Aquileia.[23] The usurper was quickly executed, leaving Theodosius as the most powerful man in the Roman world.

Master of the west?

Moving into Italy, Theodosius was confronted by a tantalizing new political reality: the chance to establish a family dynasty that would control the Roman world from Britain to the deserts of the eastern frontier. His eldest

son Arcadius had already been appointed co-emperor, while his younger son Honorius had been declared *nobilissimus puer* and had already held his first consulship in 386.[24] Theodosius could now entertain a dynastic agenda that encompassed both east and west. Implementing such a reality, however, would be more difficult. While his military victory had been complete, he was still faced a number of confronting political difficulties.

First among these was that Valentinian II still enjoyed residual support in the west, especially with those who served his father and brother. Second was that despite his Spanish origins, Theodosius was now viewed as outsider thanks to his lengthy stay in the east. As such, and despite some strong links with the court of Valentinian II, he could not hope to effectively rule in the west without the assistance of local power structures. This reality is reflected in Theodosian propaganda that sought to paint him as a saviour of the west, whose mercy was so great that he was even reluctant to deliver vengeance on Magnus Maximus himself. In the end only 'the tyrant' and some of his closest allies were killed as "expiatory victims of the war". For everyone else there was forgiveness as they had essentially been in thrall of the tyrant:

> The property of none was confiscated, no-one's liberty was forfeited, no-one's previous rank diminished. No one was branded with censure, no one was subjected to abuse, or indeed reproof, and atoned for a crime which merited death by mortification to his ears. All were restored to their homes, all to their wives and children, all finally – which is sweeter – to innocence.[25]
>
> (trans. Nixon)

This careful narrative expressed by Theodosius' panegyrist Pacatus is instructive as it reveals that the emperor understood the need to move very carefully and with an unyielding eye to his future political needs. Even taking into account the obvious poetic license Pacatus' took in reporting the aftermath of Theodosius' victory, his account is relatively accurate as there was no mass slaughter or wholescale retaliatory actions directed at the supporters of the usurper. Instead Theodosius' approach to the defeated was tactical and measured. First, he moved to immediately extinguish the dynastic legacy of Magnus Maximus by dispatching Arbogast to Trier, where he promptly executed his son and co-emperor Victor.[26] At the same time Theodosius pardoned Magnus Maximus' wife and daughter, no doubt reckoning that it would send an important signal to Magnus Maximus' supporters in the Gallic aristocracy. As for the military leadership of the usurper, Magnus Maximus' most prominent general and the man who murdered Gratian, Andragathius, had committed suicide upon hearing of his master's fate. Theodosius was thus spared the need to act. Other commanders, such as Nannienus and Quintinus, might not have been so lucky as they disappear from the historical record.[27]

Theodosius was also conscious of residual loyalties for the usurper's cause among the rank and file of the western army, but again his approach was targeted. While he made a very public show of massacring the *equites mauri*,

who had been the first unit to desert Gratian for the usurper, and who now served as useful scapegoats for the sins of their *commilitones*, he was otherwise merciful. With his own forces depleted after the campaign, he simply chose to replenish their ranks with the pick of the western army. Such an approach was both sensible and practical. It meant that he did not unnecessarily antagonise the still powerful western army and now had the best elements of the empire's armies at his immediate call. Furthermore, by blending many of the usurper's forces in with his own he was now in a position to personally monitor any units of suspect loyalty.[28]

As for the civilian hierarchy of the west, Theodosius moved to wipe all trace of the usurper's influence from government. He not only formally annulled all laws promulgated by the defunct regime but he also moved to revoke Magnus Maximus' conferrals of offices and other honours.[29] All this was necessary if Theodosius was to start building a new administration loyal to his House. But Theodosius also knew that he could not rule the west effectively without the wealthy civilian elites, particularly the powerful senatorial class of Italy. Therefore, many civilian supporters of Magnus Maximus, including most prominently Symmachus, were pardoned. There were no large-scale property confiscations and even those removed from offices they attained under Magnus Maximus were allowed to retain their prior social rank.[30]

Arguably the most important decision facing Theodosius after his defeat of Magnus Maximus was how to handle the status Valentinian II. With two sons of his own, Theodosius was never going to allow Valentinian II any autonomous control – no matter what he may have promised prior to the campaign. In turn Valentinian II himself had little leverage. The formidable Justina had died sometime during the campaign, and Theodosius' overwhelming military victory had cowed any remaining loyalists to his cause in the west.

An interesting relic has survived from this period that clearly illustrates Theodosius' newfound power following the defeat of Magnus Maximus and his firm intention for Valentinian II to remain in the background – the so-called 'Missorium of Theodosius', a stunning silver dish that was most probably given as a gift (*donum*) by the emperor to a subordinate on the occasion of his *decennalia* in 389 (see Figure 6.1). On this dish we see a large image of Theodosius, flanked by two deliberately smaller colleagues, handing an object of some kind to a subordinate, probably a civil official. There has been much debate regarding the identity of the two 'smaller' emperors flanking Theodosius, with the most likely answer being Arcadius and Valentinian II – although Arcadius and Honorius is another plausible solution. If indeed Valentinian II is represented on the dish, it is significant that he has been publicly relegated to a subordinate role despite being the 'senior' Augustus. This significance is doubled if Valentinian II has been ignored in favour of Honorius.[31]

Given that Theodosius was now publicly proclaiming his superiority, he must have quickly decided that Valentinian II had to be sidelined and could not be allowed to remain anywhere near what was left of his Italian support base. He did not want to simply kill Valentinian II as this would risk stirring

Figure 6.1 MISSORIUM OF THEODOSIUS – shows Theodosius enthroned bestowing a gift on an imperial functionary. He is flanked by two fellow rulers and guards. Below is an image of Tellus Mater ('mother earth').
Credit: Real Academia de la Historia.

up unnecessary discontent among those still loyal to the House of Valentinian. Instead he took the only other option available to him and isolated the inconvenient emperor by sending him to Gaul under the stewardship of Arbogast, who was also given effective control of the entire western army. At best Valentinian II would be an imperial figurehead, a useful imperial proxy in the west designed to project the *auctoritas* of the real emperor. At worst, he had become a puppet emperor who was essentially under house arrest.

With the way cleared, Theodosius now began to construct a new regime in the west, one that would be loyal to his family alone. The building blocks were trusted figures who had played a role in his own eastern administration. The prefecture of Gaul, home to so many past usurpations, was given to Constantianus (formerly *vicarius* of Pontica). As Praetorian Prefect of Italy (388–

389) he appointed his former Count of the Sacred Largesses Trifolius. As a reward for their leadership during the campaign against Magnus Maximus, Theodosius awarded the consulship of 389 to the generals Timasius and Promotus.[32]

Theodosius was keen to signal that the new regime did not amount to an eastern takeover so he also sought out figures from the west. He appointed a Gallic supporter, Flavius Rufinus, to the position of Master of Offices. He would go on to dominate the final years of the emperor's reign. He also cleverly resuscitated figures from Valentinian II's regime. In 390 Flavius Neoterius, who had served under both Valentinian I and the Valentinian II, succeeded Constantianus as Praetorian Prefect of Gaul. Of course, Neotorius' first loyalties would be to Theodosius – who he had served in the east, and on whose behalf he had served in the regime of the Valentinian II. In addition, Theodosius appointed Messianus, a former Proconsul of Africa, as *comes rei privatae*, and Felix Iuniorinus Polemius, who had fulfilled a number of roles for Gratian, as the successor to Trifolius in the role of Praetorian Prefect for Italy and Illyricum.[33]

Also important to Theodosius were those in the Italian aristocracy who had shown their support for Magnus Maximus, either vigorously, or through their tacit acceptance of his invasion. The need to harness their ongoing support explains the official state visit he made to the city of Rome in mid-389. It was during this visit that Pacatus delivered his famous panegyric, a speech which we heavily rely on to not only reconstruct Theodosius' conflict with Magnus Maximus but also to provide information on a number of poorly-documented periods of the emperor's life. Delivered in front of the entire Roman senate, it perfectly demonstrates the political realities facing all parties. The Roman Senate were keen to mollify their new overlord while Theodosius was keen to claim the mantle of the protector of the entire empire – and the man who saved the Senate and the people of Rome from a tyrant.[34] The new regime's attitude is on full display in the words of Pacatus:

> I hope . . . that I have had permission, both with your divine assent and the favour of the Senate, to have spoken of all that you have accomplished so bravely and successfully on behalf of the State in barbarous lands and in distant provinces.

Now that Theodosius was in Rome, the whole world could see his benevolence and the emperor was careful to play his role. The orator offers a vivid portrait of the carefully curated visit:

> But what took place in Rome; the impression you made on the first day you entered the city; how you behaved in the Senate house and on the rostra; now in a chariot, now on foot, distinguished in either mode of progress, triumphant now in war, now over pride; how you showed yourself to all as a ruler, to individuals as a senator; how in your frequent and unpretentious public appearances you not only visited public buildings but hallowed with your divine footsteps private dwellings as well all the safer, with your

> military guard removed, for the vigilance of a devoted people, let all these be praised by the tongues and voices of these men, of these men, I say, who on the subject of common joys will surely be able to extol more worthily what is most outstanding, and more justly what is especially theirs.[35]
>
> (trans. Nixon)

Here the emperor wasn't just playing the role of contented tourist, he was engaging in a charm offensive every bit as fulsome as that of the Senate. The centrepiece of imperial efforts was the granting of high-ranking positions in the new regime. Theodosius appointed Ceionius Rufius Albinus, a member of the ancient Caeionii family, as the Prefect of Rome (*praefectus urbis romae*). Symmachus was forgiven for his support of Magnus Maximus and was named consul for the year 390. Nicomachus Flavianus, a leading senatorial scion whose career stretched back to the 360s, was made Quaestor of the Sacred Palace (*quaestor sacri palatii*) and then replaced Polemius as Praetorian Prefect of Italy and Illyricum in 390.[36] Importantly, the recipients of these offices were not only representative of the powerful senatorial class of the west, they were also pagans. It would seem incongruous that at roughly the same time he was making such appointments Theodosius would also unleash a seemingly severe wave of anti-pagan legislation.[37] But as we have seen, Theodosius would never allow religious sensitivities to impact his political reality. He realised that his dynastic plans could only be achieved with the support of the Roman Senate and we have evidence that his calculated approach paid immediate benefits. Caeionius Rufius Albinus set up a number of statues that both inserted Theodosius himself into the line of 'legitimate' emperors of the west and paid tribute to his extended family, including his parents, and crucially his two young sons.[38]

It was during this visit to Rome that Theodosius publicly displayed his dynastic plans. With Valentinian II safely ensconced in Vienne, Theodosius sent eastwards for his younger son and included him as part of his delegation to Rome.[39] This deliberate snub of the 'senior' emperor sent a clear message regarding his future plans for the west. When Theodosius moved against Magnus Maximus, Arcadius had been left in Constantinople as a symbol of the regime's ongoing control of the east. By taking Honorius with him to the western capital, the emperor was signalling that the west's political destiny now lay within his family.

Overall Theodosius' charm offensive was successful, because he had a willing and receptive audience. In the wake of Magnus Maximus' defeat the senatorial and military establishment of the west was in no mood to challenge the emperor. In addition, Theodosius' own western origins may have helped him to persuade at least some western powerbrokers that he was 'one of their own' despite his long absence in the east. However, despite his best efforts, these successes would only be temporary. Soon, Theodosius would again be facing great political uncertainty in the west and be left in the unenviable position of trying to deliver a permanent solution for his western ambitions.

Notes

1 Zos. 4.43.1; Soc. 5.11; Soz. 7.13–14; Ruf. *HE* 1.16; Theod. *HE* 5.14.
2 Amb. *Ep.* 30(24).13. We must remember however that this letter seems to have been heavily revised before publication. One of the reasons for this would be to demonstrate that Ambrose had pre-warned Valentinian II about the intentions of Magnus Maximus.
3 Matthews (1975) 180ff offers a good overview of the possible reasons Magnus Maximus chose this juncture to attack Italy. See also Errington (2006) 35; Maraval (2009) 181 and Nixon & Rodgers (1994) 492, fn. 108.
4 Ruf. *HE* 11.16; Magnus Maximus' Letter: *Collecto Avellana* 39.
5 *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).30.2–5.
6 Delmaire (1997) 120–122 believes that his reception was more mixed.
7 Zos. 4.47.1 says that Victor was appointed as Caesar. This is incorrect – see *Epit. Caes.* 48.6 that notes he was appointed as Augustus. The latter's position is supported by epigraphic evidence (*ILS* 788) the coinage –see *RIX* IX p 318 for the different obverse legends ascribed to Victor.
8 Theod. *HE* 5.15.1; Ruf. *HE* 11.17. That said, given Valentinian II was now completely at the mercy of Theodosius we should not doubt that he would have abandoned any Arian beliefs he had – certainly Amb. *Ep.* 25 (53) credits Theodosius with a religious shift in the young emperor.
9 Our sources note the grief both Theodosius and Flaccilla felt when Pulcheria died – Amb. *de ob. Theod.* 40.2–5.
10 Orosius 7.35.2; Zos. 4.43–44.
11 For once Pacatus' claims, *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).32.1, that "you carried out the war with such careful planning and so many calculations that you seemed to be preparing to fight it out with some Perseus or Pyrrhus, even with Hannibal himself" ring true.
12 Soc. 5.13.
13 Burns (1994) 95.
14 Orosius 7.35.2 says that Theodosius had inferior resources when it came to war.
15 Zos. 4.45.3. It is of course possible that Zosimus was highlighting a very minor effort in order to drive home his narrative that Theodosius had continually mishandled his relationship with the Goths – see Burns (1994) 96.
16 *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).32.3 – "Finally you granted the privileged status of fellow soldiers to the barbarian peoples who promised to give you voluntary service. . . ."
17 Philostorgius 10.8. *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).32.4. See Burns (1994) 96, including fn. 23. Arbogast: it is interesting that Arbogast seems to have here switched his primary loyalty from Valentinian II to Theodosius. This could have due a previous association with the emperor when he, along with Bauto, had been sent to aid Theodosius by Gratian sometime during 381 (Zos. 4.33.1–2). Whatever the case it seems clear that Arbogast was adept at sniffing the political winds.
18 *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).32.3 admits that Theodosius did not fully trust the barbarians. By putting them in his expeditionary army he "removed from the frontier forces of dubious loyalty."
19 Orosius 7.35.3–4; Zos. 4.46.1–2. On the basis of *P. Lips.* I 63 it has been suggested that another expedition was launched – from Egypt into North Africa.
20 Zos. 4.46.1–2.
21 McLynn (1994) 293–294 ascribes a victory in Sicily to Valentinian as part of his 'leadership' of the naval expedition. There is no evidence that Valentinian was given any leadership role of the force – and it is not clear that Ambrose's reference to the victory (*Ep.* 74 (40).22–23) refers to the expedition at all.
22 *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).36.3–4.

23 *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).43.1–6; Zos. 4.46.2; Orosius 7.35.4; Soc. 5.14; Soz. 7.14. On the differences in the accounts see Nixon and Rodgers (1994) 510, fn. 147.
24 On Honorius' early honours see Chapter 5, page 78 fn. 23.
25 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).45.1–7. We see echoes of this approach in Amb. *Ep.* 74.25 – although the bishop claims he was responsible for the positive outcomes.
26 Zos. 4.47.1; *Epit. Caes.* 48.6.
27 Andragathius: Zos. 4.47.1; Orosius 7.35.5. Nannienus and Quintinus: Greg. Tur. *HF* 2.9.
28 Amb. *Ep.* 40.32; *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).45.5. On the fate of the *equites mauri* see *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).45.5, who are here described as "a few of the Moorish enemy, whom he had shut up with him like a hellish brigade. . . ." On the integration of western units into the eastern army see Hoffmann (1969) 481–487. Hoffmann (pages 503–504) further argues that following the war's conclusion, the reunited Roman army (particularly the auxilia) contained large "Foederatenkontingente" in the form of new units named after the Theodosian family.
29 Which was why *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).45.6 could note that "no-one's previous rank was diminished".
30 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).45.6. Symmachus: Soc. 5.14.4–9; Symm. *Ep.* 2.13, 28, 30, 31 and 32. Annulment of laws: *CTh*. 15.14.6. Retraction of honours and positions *CTh*. 15.14.7–8.
31 A vast amount has been written about the 'Missorium of Theodosius' with debate raging on its date, which emperors are portrayed and the nature of the ceremony displayed. González (2013) offers an excellent summary of many of these debates. Overall I have followed Kiilerich (2000) 273ff in first linking the object to Theodosius and his *decennalia* and in identifying the other emperors in the scene as Arcadius and either Valentinian II or Honorius.
32 *PLRE* 1, Constantianus 2; Trifolius; Flavius Timasius and Flavius Promotus. On the consulships of Timasius and Promotus see also Bagnall (1987) 312–313.
33 *PLRE* 1, Flavius Rufinus 18; Flavius Neoterius; Messianus; Felix Iuniorinus Polemius 5.
34 See Nixon & Rodgers (1994) 443–444 for circumstances of Pacatus' speech. For the date of the visit to Rome see *Cons. Const*. a.389; Marcell. com. a.389.1. and *Chron. Pasch*. a.389 Soc. 5.14; Soz. 7.14.7 and Ruf. *HE* 2.17 all connect the visit with a triumph held to celebrate the victory over Magnus Maximus.
35 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).47.2–4. Claudian *de VI Cos.* 60–62 also claims that Theodosius visited the houses of the rich and poor alike in Rome without an escort.
36 *PLRE* 1, Caeionius Rufius Albinus 15; Q. Aurelius Symmachus 4; Virius Nicomachus Flavianus 15; and Felix Iuniorinus Polemius 5.
37 For an overview of this legislation see Chapter 8, pages 117ff in the current volume.
38 Matthews (1975) 227 – the relevant *CIL* references can be found at fn. 2.
39 *Cons. Const*. a.389.

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Part III

The final years: conflict and chaos

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7 The emperor and the bishop

After defeating Magnus Maximus in 388, Theodosius would remain in the west until 391. It was during this time that he would come into conflict with one of the most celebrated figures of the late Antique church, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. Their subsequent history is cited as a pivotal moment in the developing relationship between church and state, with its effects supposedly felt long after the late antique period had ended. It has even been pinpointed as the literal first step on the road to Canossa.[1] That this relationship has been considered so important is not surprising. It was tempestuous and produced a litany of controversial incidents that fascinated many of our sources. On its surface this was a clash between the unquestioned head of the Roman state and the leading light of an increasingly dominant and politically significant religion, with neither willing to back down. Such a struggle, dramatic enough on its own, is intensified by its broader backdrop of internal political turmoil and a gathering threat to the empire's borders. But while the context of the relationship between Theodosius and Ambrose was suitably dramatic, did it really have an actual impact on the course of Theodosius' reign, or for that matter on the subsequent relationship between church and state? Or has its significance been overinflated by both our ancient sources and those who have followed them?

An unlikely bishop?

Ambrose was born around 340 at Trier in Gaul, where his father held the position of Praetorian Prefect, probably under Constantine II. Although it was very unlikely that Ambrose was a member of Rome's senatorial elite, he would have had direct contacts with the powerful class of officials who ran the Constantinian empire.[2] Ambrose's father died while the future bishop was an infant. It was a tragedy that would shape the course of his life as it resulted in Ambrose, his mother and his sister Marcellina moving to Rome. At this stage Ambrose was not yet destined for a career in the church, although sometime in the early 350s his sister Marcellina took a vow of virginity in a ceremony presided over by Pope Liberius himself, suggesting that the family were held in some esteem by Rome's Christian community.[3] Ambrose meanwhile

completed his education and in 368 began a career in the imperial bureaucracy under the patronage of the Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum, Italy and Africa, Petronius Probus who had begun his own career under the Constantinian dynasty yet had also flourished under their successors. Ambrose's career progression is set out by his biographer Paulinus:

> After he had been trained in the liberal arts he left Rome and having been accepted to practice law before the prefecture of the praetorium, he argued cases so brilliantly that he was chosen by the illustrious man Probus, then Praetorian Prefect, to serve as his counsel. After this he was invested as consularis, to rule the provinces of Liguria and Aemilia, and he came to Milan.[4]
>
> (trans. Ramsey)

We know nothing about how Ambrose engineered his relatively rapid rise to prominence, although his later career would suggest a mix of talent, a ruthless drive for self-promotion and the ability to cultivate relationships with powerful individuals as the obvious catalysts. It was while Ambrose was serving as Governor (*consularis*) of Aemilia and Liguria around 372–373 that the most consequential twist in his career occurred. At this time the province was riven by religious discord, with the Christian community of Milan split between two warring factions. The dominant Arian group were led by Auxentius, Bishop of Milan, who had maintained his position in the face of the Nicene dominance of the west.[5] In 374 Auxentius died and left a bitterly divided community in his wake. As Governor, Ambrose was called in to maintain order and no doubt to manage the delicate situation of appointing a successor. It was here that Ambrose somehow morphed from imperial bureaucrat to bishop. A raft of Christian sources claim that while Ambrose was addressing the congregation in the main cathedral of Milan many present began to call for him to take up the position himself. After a period during which Ambrose made the appropriate protestations of refusal, he eventually agreed and was ordained as Bishop of Milan.[6]

Of course, the idea that Ambrose could somehow unite a bitterly divided community as a consensus choice is somewhat fantastical and represents the later Christian tradition that sought to present him as a direct instrument of god, placed into the church by divine will. More likely, the death of Auxentius placed the Arian party in a helpless position and they could no longer resist a Nicene replacement. At this stage, despite being associated with the majority Nicene faction, Ambrose was probably not viewed as a theological hardliner. Instead, as someone who had spent his time in the imperial bureaucracy, he would have been viewed as a useful and stabilising solution to a situation causing the secular authorities great angst. This is hinted at in both Paulinus' claim that before leaving for his Governorship Ambrose had been told by Probus to "go, and act not as a judge but as a bishop," and Valentinian's supposedly enthusiastic embrace of the 'people's choice' for the bishopric.[7]

However, it is Ambrose's great opponent Palladius who is probably closest to the truth when he notes that "You were appointed irregularly and unworthily, by the good graces of your friends and through human patronage."[8]

As bishop of one of the most geographically important cities in the empire, Ambrose was now in a position to become an important power player in the murky world of imperial politics. For the first years of his tenure he sought to endear himself to the dominant Nicene faction of the west and dedicated his efforts towards ridding Italy of its remaining Arians (no doubt making valuable connections throughout the western church and imperial establishment). Ambrose quickly proved himself a useful organiser for the Nicene cause. In particular he was able to put his literary talents to work, producing a number of anti-Arian works, including *De Fide*, which he dedicated to Gratian, who had become emperor following the death of his father Valentinian I in 375.[9]

The accession of a new and largely untested emperor proved fortuitous for Ambrose. Gratian was more interested in church matters than his father, who had maintained a studious distance from doctrinal squabbles. In addition, the post-Adrianople military situation meant that by 380/81 the emperor had shifted his court from Gaul to Milan in order to monitor the volatile provinces to the north. Ambrose was now permanently in the orbit of Gratian and worked quickly to ingratiate himself with the emperor. Even allowing for Ambrose's inflated claims regarding his role as a spiritual mentor for Gratian, the ambitious bishop used the authority of his office and the geographical proximity he enjoyed to the emperor in cunning fashion.[10] In 381 he protected Gratian's reputation by deftly spinning the failure of the eastern bishops to attend the Council of Aquileia. He then used the conference itself to out-manoeuvre his Arian opponents and bolster his own reputation as a staunch leader of the Nicene cause in the west. He also made sure to take credit for Gratian's increasing support for that faction.[11]

It was around this time that Ambrose's growing ambitions first impacted on Theodosius' own religious program. Thanks to the eastern emperor's determined efforts to support the Nicene cause, western church leaders now saw a chance to impose their own will in the ecclesiastical affairs of the eastern church. In particular they sought to influence the long-running dispute regarding who was the rightful Bishop of Antioch as well as challenge the emperor's choice of Nectarius for the key position of Bishop of Constantinople.[12] They did this via a number of letters sent to Theodosius, written in the name of the Council of Aquileia, but almost certainly principally authored by Ambrose.[13] Unfortunately, Ambrose did not have the influence over Theodosius that he had over Gratian. The eastern emperor remained determined to establish his independence from the west, and consequently he stood firm. Theodosius refused to consider the demands of the west and while we do not possess his extant response, later letters written by Ambrose suggest that the eastern emperor had made his displeasure at this interference in his affairs very clear.[14] Despite this interaction we must be careful not to assume that Theodosius and Ambrose now had an ongoing relationship, or

even regularly corresponded. At this stage it is doubtful that Theodosius was particularly interested in Ambrose himself, although he was no doubt concerned about western efforts to interfere in his affairs. That said, this episode may have influenced Theodosius' view of Ambrose and perhaps contributed to the confrontational stance he would later take towards the bishop when they came face to face in Italy.

A change in fortunes

With the downfall of Gratian at the hands of Magnus Maximus in 383, Ambrose's time as a figure of influence in the imperial court was cut short. The political climate empire wide was now fraught as Theodosius grappled with his reaction to his fellow Spaniard's rise. Adding to the uncertainty was the status of Valentinian II, who had been left at Milan by his half-brother and who was now technically the senior Augustus of the college and the last remaining heir of Valentinian I. Whereas previously Valentinian II had had no real responsibility under his brother, he now found himself ruling a small but geographically crucial part of the empire including Italy and North Africa. Accordingly, a 'loyalist court' quickly sprung up around the young emperor, populated primarily by individuals from the senatorial aristocracy of Italy who were reticent to lose their proximity to imperial power and had no guarantee they would be accepted by Magnus Maximus.[15] For Ambrose the situation was further complicated by the fact that Valentinian II favoured the Arian cause thanks to the influence of his mother Justina, someone Ambrose had an uneasy relationship with after they had been on opposing sides of a doctrinal dispute in Illyricum.[16] Ambrose's most obvious reaction to the new political order would have been to flee to either Magnus Maximus or Theodosius, as both were proponents of Nicene doctrine. However, he decided to stay in Milan. In later years, Ambrose would portray his decision as a selfless one, arguing that he stayed to protect the Valentinian from pernicious influences, but in reality he was simply unwilling to leave his established powerbase and its proximity to the "machinery of government".[17] Ambrose was a devout Christian but as his life would show again and again, access to political power always trumped piety.

Ambrose himself paints a vivid picture of his time under Valentinian II and we must be careful not to unquestioningly accept his self-serving and overly simplistic account.[18] That said, the period was extremely tumultuous and Ambrose was clearly central to both a number of important imperial decisions, including the failed attempt to have Valentinian II restore the Altar of Victory in the Senate House, and an as yet unheard of friction between church and state that led the Arian empress Justina to send troops against Ambrose and his followers. These episodes have been well-documented and there is no need to treat them in any detail here.[19] However, it was Ambrose's experiences during this period, in which he faced a hostile court, that would mould him into the formidable figure who challenged the authority of Theodosius. Under Valentinian II Ambrose was forced to become the most astute kind of politician;

someone who understood his own power and how it could be most effectively leveraged for maximum effect. In a letter to Valentinian II Ambrose famously stated that "the emperor is in the church, not above the church."[20] Given the position he found himself in vis- à-vis the new regime, this was a statement of political survival rather than a sincere statement of religious belief. Finding himself outside the formal mechanisms of secular power, Ambrose doubled down on the only strength he had left – his exalted position within the church.

During this period Ambrose took calculated risks to maintain his power in circumstances that could have proved ultimately fatal. For example, in 383, despite his enmity with Valentinian II, Ambrose agreed to visit the court of his co-religionist Magnus Maximus on behalf of his new emperor in a desperate effort to forestall an invasion of Italy. His mission was a success as it gave Valentinian II's loyal general Bauto time to seal off the Alpine passes from Gaul into Italy from the usurper's forces. As a result of participating in this embassy, Ambrose lost any chance of future advancement with the usurper, as Magnus Maximus (rightly) believed that it had been a ruse to buy the young emperor time. Even after tensions reached boiling point between Ambrose and Valentinian II with the siege of the basilica in Milan (the episode itself being another example of the bishop's willingness to take political risks), Ambrose sought to maintain his status and authority in the eyes of his supporters and enemies alike by later agreeing to undertake a second risky embassy to Magnus Maximus to negotiate the return of Gratian's body.[21]

Ultimately, Ambrose was able to survive the reign of Valentinian II due to his impeccable web of contacts among Italy's civilian and religious elite, to whom he cleverly represented himself as a source of continuity and stability in a period of rapidly shifting political turmoil. He was also willing to present himself as a religious martyr putting his life on the line to defeat the perfidious and 'foreign' Arianism of Justina. [22]

We know absolutely nothing about how Ambrose navigated the period that Magnus Maximus spent in Italy following the downfall of Valentinian II in 387. Ambrose himself is tellingly quiet on the subject, although his biographer Paulinus tries to argue that the bishop acted as a moral counterbalance to a blood-soaked butcher.[23] Most likely, Ambrose simply offered the usurper a wary acceptance. He did not attempt to flee to Theodosius, and perhaps felt that his status in the Nicene community would protect him. Given their past history, Ambrose was unlikely to become an imperial confidant but nor would he have accepted political irrelevance. Whatever his activities under the usurper, they were of no lasting significance as after Theodosius defeated Magnus Maximus he made the tactical decision to pardon those who had collaborated with the former regime.[24]

A new emperor

For Ambrose, Theodosius' arrival in Milan represented both opportunity and threat. He now had the opportunity to leverage his reputation as a champion of Nicene doctrine within the court of an emperor who shared his views and

who had chosen to reside at the epicenter of Ambrose's sphere of influence. But unlike Valentinian II, Theodosius was a domineering force, a militarily powerful emperor who had successfully imposed his will on the eastern church. As such he would look disapprovingly on any bishop who tried to follow an independent course, let alone one like Ambrose who had previously attempted to interfere with his ecclesiastical arrangements in the east.

It did not take long for the ambitious bishop to come into conflict with his new emperor. Shortly after Theodosius came to Milan, he attended a mass held in Ambrose's cathedral. In the east Theodosius had been permitted to sit with the priests who gathered behind the altar. In the west, however, the emperor was usually seated at the front of the congregation and Ambrose demanded that the emperor follow this tradition in his church. In the face of this opposition, Theodosius meekly backed down. As with most interactions between Theodosius and Ambrose, our Christian sources attempt to paint the incident as an exemplar of a pious emperor submitting to god's will via his church.[25] However, there were more earthly concerns at play here and the incident provides a useful insight into the motivations of both principal players. Theodosius was new to Italy and keen to build the alliances he would need to cement his rule in the west. He clearly did not want to antagonise Ambrose. For Ambrose this was an opportunity to both reassert his identity as a dominant figure in the western church and to signal to the new emperor that he expected his authority to be respected.[26] The incident takes on an even greater political tone when we remember that it was Nectarius, the pliable hand-picked Bishop of Constantinople that had allowed Theodosius to sit with the priests during services in order to emphasise that the eastern church was legitimised by his authority alone. Ambrose was determined not to cede his authority to the emperor in the same way and cleverly used a western tradition to send a very pointed message.[27] As for Theodosius, this incident must have served as a reminder of the bishop's past interference in his affairs and planted a seed of suspicion regarding his motivations. Such suspicions would have been magnified even further given this event occurred after Theodosius had pardoned a range of Magnus Maximus' supporters at the request of Ambrose.[28]

If we accept that the early relationship between Ambrose and Theodosius was one of wary suspicion, the conflagration that was to come is far easier to understand. Tensions were to escalate when in late 388 Theodosius received word of two episodes of religious disorder on the eastern frontier from his Count of the East.[29] The first, and most serious, was the destruction of a Jewish temple at the town of Callinicum on the middle Euphrates in Syria (Raqqa) by a Christian mob led by the local bishop. A second and separate attack occurred around the same time when a group of monks destroyed a gnostic temple in the hinterland of Antioch.[30] Coming in the wake of both a fragile peace with Persia, and the Riot of the Statues in Antioch, the emperor, nervous at being so far from the eastern reaches of his realm, sought to deliver a response that would quickly settle the matter. Accordingly, he demanded

immediate punishment of the perpetrators as well as financial restitution for the victims. The bishop who had led the attack on the synagogue was to take both practical and financial responsibility for its rebuilding.[31] Ambrose decided to challenge these imperial decisions, probably with the hope of again being able to present himself to his extensive political networks as a key influencer at the new imperial court. He wrote to the emperor informing him that the punishment he had handed down was problematic, as it would either make the bishop an apostate to the Christian faith or turn him into martyr.[32] In addition, Ambrose returned to a similar argument he had employed against Valentinian II, that secular matters and the authority of the emperor must be subservient to the needs of god.[33] If Theodosius would not accept him as an advisor in his consistory, Ambrose would flaunt his status as a representative of god on earth.

The obvious undertone of this advice was that Ambrose himself would use his influence and status within the church to ensure that the Christian world knew of the emperor's 'impious' actions.[34] Again, Theodosius quickly backtracked from his original pronouncement, suggesting that there may have been a level of truth in Ambrose's view that the decision would cause widespread disquiet in the church. Theodosius had cleverly used the Christian church to cement his own rule in the east but this episode reinforces that the growing strength of the church also presented problems to the secular authority – particularly when they tried to impose punishments on the clergy.[35]

Despite casting his initial interference in the Callinicum matter as that of a devout Christian trying to protect his emperor and his faith, Ambrose's subsequent actions demonstrate that this was above all else a political opportunity.[36] A private success was not enough for Ambrose, who wished to show the world that he had the ability to sway the emperor's will.[37] Even though the emperor had already relented in his plans due to Ambrose's correspondence, the bishop decided that his triumph needed to be public. During a sermon, at which Theodosius was in attendance, he launched a strident attack on the Jewish people, including directly addressing the Callinicum issue.[38] On the completion of his sermon he approached Theodosius and demanded that the emperor confirm that he would forgo any further action on the incident. Despite a vigorous interjection from the outraged general Timasius, the ever-cautious emperor again agreed that no penalties would be levied against any of the perpetrators in the east.[39] Although we rely almost solely on Ambrose's overly dramatised account, this confrontation no doubt took place in some form and it remained a brazen gambit on his part. That he took such a risk suggests that, despite his initial success in changing the emperor's mind, he still felt excluded from the imperial court, or at least felt he was perceived by those around him as lacking in influence.[40]

The carefully edited correspondence relating to the Callinicum matter that Ambrose later released shows that he was to pay a price for both this 'public victory' and yet another attempt to meddle in imperial affairs.[41] Shortly after interrupting Theodosius' efforts to maintain order in the east, Ambrose

pressured Theodosius into rejecting the requests made by a senatorial delegation from Rome. We do not know exactly what these requests were. Some have claimed that this delegation was again seeking to reverse Gratian's decision to remove the Altar of Victory from the Senate House and funding for the State cults, although this is far from certain. It is more likely that they sought something more modest – a plausible suggestion being an invitation to fill the ranks of the traditional priestly colleges.[42] Circumstances would suggest that Ambrose's motivations in opposing the delegation were again driven by political imperatives rather than any religious convictions. Theodosius' success in wooing the pagan senatorial elite during his recent visit to Rome represented a threat to Ambrose's own standing. The bishop viewed the pagan loyalists as a threat to the church, and thus to his influence with the new emperor. At the very least Theodosius' success in building bridges with the senate threatened Ambrose who was looking to parley his own strong relationships with the likes of Symmachus to become the emperor's conduit with this crucial institution.

Theodosius' rejection of the delegation's request speaks to Ambrose's influential status within the western church as well as the emperor's residual fear of offending an institution that should have been his natural ally. But while the emperor in this case capitulated yet again, his patience with Ambrose was spent. Granting what was probably an innocuous request would have cemented the political goodwill he had created on his recent Roman visit. Ambrose's truculence had stolen that victory from him. The emperor's retribution was swift. Ambrose was not only physically banished from court, he was also cut off from his former sources of information. Ambrose protested that "he alone of all at your (Theodosius') court had been stripped of the natural right of hearing, with the consequence that I had also been deprived of the power of speaking". He had been punished because "you (Theodosius) have frequently been offended because I obtained knowledge of a number of decisions which had been taken in the consistory"[43] (trans. Liebeschuetz).

Ambrose was subsequently put in the embarrassing position of having to publicly plead ill-health as a reason for his inaction on matters for which he would usually try and lobby the emperor.[44] Although he later sought to gloss over this banishment, at the time it was a serious reverse for a man who traded on relationships, influence and access.[45] Under Valentinian II, Ambrose may have been considered an enemy of the regime – but he was still acknowledged as a powerful figure. Now he was *persona non grata* in the court of the emperor: an infinitely worse proposition. This banishment only came to an end thanks to an affair that is often considered one of the most infamous of the entire late antique period.

An infamous massacre

Sometime in the summer of 390 imperial troops, supposedly acting on behalf of the emperor, killed a significant number of people in the city of Thessalonica. This incident, the so-called 'Massacre at Thessalonica', is by far the most dissected

event of Theodosius' long reign. It, and the course of events it unleashed in its wake, has been judged as both immediately consequential for the regime of Theodosius and, perhaps even more importantly, serving as a precedent that helped determine the future shape and course of the relationship between church and state.[46]

However, this dominant narrative is suspect as it can be traced back to one of the latest and most untrustworthy accounts of the entire episode – that of Theodoret. His tale of a wrathful emperor who commits a monstrous crime after being misled by evil forces and then who achieves redemption via Ambrose, the only man in the empire brave enough to stand up against him, is superbly told but for the most part fictional. In truth we cannot be sure of much regarding the entire episode – both in terms of the chain of events that led to the actual 'massacre', the emperor's response, or even the resulting 'conflict' between Ambrose and Theodosius.[47] Such details are hidden from us by source material that seeks to paint a biblical story of moral redemption rather than illuminate the reader on historical fact.[48] Nonetheless, we must attempt to offer a plausible reconstruction of how the incident occurred if we are to understand its significance for the relationship between Theodosius and Ambrose, not to mention its ongoing impact.

Events began early in 390, when the Gothic commander of the garrison of Thessalonica, Butheric, was lynched by a mob, maybe in connection with the arrest and imprisonment of a prominent charioteer.[49] Butheric held a very senior military position (probably Magister Militum for Illyricum) and his death represented a direct threat to the authority of the emperor. Not surprisingly news quickly reached Theodosius at Milan.[50] Many sources paint the emperor's reaction as one of immediate and volcanic anger whereby he directly ordered a retaliatory massacre of the citizens of Thessalonica.[51] Such an action on the emperor's part is highly unlikely and even if Theodosius was legitimately angered by the incident, he must have taken time to consider his response. Emperors in the late antique period were surrounded by an extensive machinery of government which not only assisted in decision making but also moderated rash imperial pronouncements.[52] Theodosius was no exception and there are indications that the emperor took the issue to his consistory. Indeed, some sources blame the emperor's advisors for the massacre, with Theodoret going the furthest and naming the Master of Offices Rufinus as the culprit.[53] In addition, Ambrose hints that the deliberations were ongoing, and that he had been able to send a number of petitions regarding the matter to the emperor.[54] Finally, the time between the death of Butheric and the actual massacre was at least three months – again suggesting ongoing deliberations by Theodosius rather than an immediate response.

We do not know exactly what decision the emperor and his advisors reached but in the summer of 390, troops either stationed in Thessalonica, or sent to restore order, did kill a substantial number of people within the city. Sozomen says that "the city was filled with the blood of many unjustly shed", including many people who were visiting the city and had nothing to do with

the original offence. Paulinus notes that "the city was given over to the sword until the third hour, and many innocent people were slaughtered". Theodoret speaks of "unsheathed swords of injustice right and left without distinction (which) slew innocent and guilty together". He also emphasises the unjust nature of the penalty and offers a number of casualties: "No trial preceded the sentence. No condemnation was passed on the perpetrators of the crimes. Multitudes were mowed down like ears of grain in harvest-tide. It is said that seven thousand perished"[55] (trans. Jackson).

The massacre was almost certainly not Theodosius' plan. He had not previously acted in a similar manner when reports had reached him of disturbances at Antioch and Constantinople. Instead he had imposed limited penalties that allowed him to display his *clementia*. For Theodosius to directly order such an expansive slaughter would have also been politically dangerous for him. Instead, in all likelihood he actually ordered a far more limited, and politically viable punishment. He would not want to appear as a tyrant in the west, where he was still trying to implement his authority. However, he also had to demonstrate to the Gothic troops of Butheric that he was not ignoring the murder of their commander and that punishment would be levied against those responsible.[56]

The most likely punishment actually ordered by the emperor was the public execution of the perpetrators of the crime. Such a move would explain Sozomen's reference to Theodosius' order that a "certain number of citizens" be put to death. It would also explain why Rufinus places the massacre in the circus of Thessalonica.[57] This public facility would be the perfect place to visibly dispense justice on those responsible for the crime, an action which would placate the garrison and dissuade the wider population from any further disturbances.

From here it is not difficult to see how a controlled action targeting only those responsible for Butheric's death could morph into a full-scale massacre. It is very plausible that a situation developed whereby the outnumbered garrison, spooked by a large crowd who were outraged at the punishment being handed down on their fellow citizens, reacted by indiscriminately starting to kill the gathered citizenry. Likewise, we could also conceive of an aggrieved garrison who considered the punishment to be too lenient and who subsequently decided to take matters into their own hands.[58] In addition, unlike during the Riot of the Statues, we have no evidence that Theodosius selected officials to oversee his orders. Instead the punishment seems to have been carried out by subordinates of the deceased Butheric with a minimum of imperial oversight.[59] It was a recipe for disaster and although the massacre clearly occurred it was by accident rather than by design.

News of the massacre spread very quickly. Ambrose tells us that when word reached a synod he was participating in with a delegation of Gallic bishops, there was "no one there who did not lament, nobody who took it lightly". Rufinus says that Theodosius was reproved by the "priests of the Italy", again suggesting widespread horror among the clergy at his perceived actions.[60]

Although Theodosius did not directly order the massacre, he was clearly blamed for it and no doubt other sections of society reacted in the same way. While many sources present the massacre as a spiritual problem for Theodosius, it was actually more a multifaceted political issue for the emperor. The empire was still recovering from the horror of Adrianople, and a massacre of citizens by Gothic recruits was an untimely reminder that the emperor had recruited vast amounts of Rome's former enemies into the army. In addition Theodosius had attacked Magnus Maximus promising to free the west from a bloodthirsty tyrant.[61] Now he had committed the very crime he had accused his former opponent of. The event also had potential political considerations for Theodosius in relation to the western powerbrokers he needed to mollify. If they began to fear that their new emperor could one day again order similar massacres, their tenuous support for him could waver and they could instead re-align themselves with Valentinian II, or even another candidate altogether.

Why Ambrose became a central fixture in the brewing controversy remains poorly understood.[62] It may have been that he was encouraged by others to become the standard bearer for existing disquiet but it is more likely that he simply saw the incident as a fortuitous opportunity for his own political resuscitation. We need not doubt his personal outrage: the massacre had clearly shocked many, particularly within the church. But as Ambrose had previously proven, he was adept at using circumstances to benefit his own career. Given his recent banishment from court, this looming crisis represented a chance for him to regain his influence with the emperor.

Understanding just how Ambrose did this is difficult as our sources paint the subsequent interactions between Theodosius and Ambrose after the Massacre of Thessalonica in a very simplistic, and somewhat misleading, narrative of challenge, conflict and eventual redemption. This is most pronounced in Theodoret's provocative and influential account. In his retelling there is a grand confrontation between church and state, with Ambrose moving to punish the emperor for his sin (that is ordering the massacre) by physically denying him entrance to the cathedral in Milan and then condemning him to eight months of moral purgatory where the emperor "sat in his palace shedding a storm of tears". In his version of events Ambrose remained resolute in his position, refusing the entreaties of Theodosius' officials and forcing the emperor to humble himself before the church and god in a public display of penance. As a result of Ambrose's intransigence, Theodosius was then redeemed and became a model of how a good Christian emperor should act. Throughout the episode Ambrose is portrayed as playing a righteous role as god's instrument, with the end result being that both protagonists deserved praise:

> So both the archbishop and the emperor showed a mighty shining light of virtue. Both to me are admirable; the former for his brave words, the latter for his docility; the archbishop for the warmth of his zeal, and the prince for the purity of his faith.[63]
>
> (trans. Jackson)

This narrative whereby Ambrose 'forced' the emperor into accepting guilt for his actions contains a number of prominent flaws. To understand what really happened it is necessary to consider both Ambrose's rationale in becoming involved with the affair and what (if any) indications exist in the sources as to how the emperor himself viewed his own actions. Many commentators argue that Theodosius' subsequent response to Ambrose was a sincere psychological reaction to an act that had been weighing on his conscience.[64] On this reading the emperor was determined to do the right thing whatever the political consequences. However, on closer examination the story of the righteous bishop and the tortured, remorseful emperor is unconvincing. For one, the dominant narrative pushed by Theodoret at times borders on fiction, particularly the idea that Theodosius spent eight months sequestered in his palace at Milan. What's more the famous 'confrontation on the cathedral steps' that forms a centerpiece of his account likely never happened.[65]

McLynn suggests a more plausible narrative, one that aligns with the events leading up to the massacre. He argues that Ambrose was not seeking to 'win' a confrontation with the emperor but instead was providing him with a useful 'solution' to an imperial public relations nightmare. In short, Ambrose was offering the emperor a 'way out' of his predicament and in the process hoped to rehabilitate his own relationship with Theodosius and once again be seen as an individual able to influence the actions of the emperor. This position is supported by a carefully considered letter Ambrose wrote to the emperor shortly after the massacre. In it he notes that, like all men, the emperor would from time to time sin and his actions in precipitating the massacre at Thessalonica were an example of this human failing and nothing more. Ambrose then suggests that Theodosius could solve his dilemma very simply. He just needed to "lift this burden of sin from your kingship . . . by humbling your soul before God . . . sin cannot be abolished otherwise than by tears and penitence".[66]

Ambrose was not, as some have argued, threatening to ex-communicate the emperor.[67] Nor was he suggesting that Theodosius undergo a drawn-out process of public flagellation. Instead he was offering the emperor and his advisors a carefully controlled process that would protect Theodosius' *auctoritas* while at the same time rehabilitating his public persona to the shocked western elites. As for what the actual 'process of penance' undertaken by the emperor looked like, we are left to guess based on threads of information gathered from various sources. There seems to have been at least one act of public penance performed in Ambrose's church where the emperor "admitted the crime, acknowledged his sin with tears and did public penance in the sight of the whole church". Ambrose of course highlights the theatrical aspect of the occasion, saying that the emperor "threw to the ground all the royal attire he was wearing; he wept publicly in church over his sin…with groans and tears he prayed for forgiveness" (trans. Liebeschuetz). This was followed by a longer period during which Theodosius did not (as Theodoret claims) cower in his palace, but instead undertook the highly symbolic (but in practical

terms empty) act of abstaining from wearing imperial garments. We do not know the exact length of this period. Rufinus simply notes that the emperor "patiently completed the time prescribed him for it", while Sozomen talks of time set apart for penance. It is usually thought that the period was at the latest over by Easter of 391, although it may have ended earlier.[68]

A number of sources cite one final and controversial element in the emperor's penance. Supposedly, after ordering the massacre, an immediately remorseful Theodosius had attempted to countermand it, but this reprieve had reached the city too late. So as a result, Ambrose forced the emperor to issue a law stating that future imperial pronouncements of capital punishment would be delayed by 30 days.[69] This is a highly dubious story as we have no record of such a law being handed down at that time. However, we do know that Theodosius issued a similar law some eight years earlier in 382 and many observers have uncritically assumed that the compilers of the code made a mistake and that the law actually belongs to 390. However, given that the arguments for a change of date rely on a massacre that Theodosius almost certainly never ordered, there is no real basis to make such an emendation. Also it is important to remember that such laws were not unique to the reign of Theodosius. Stays of execution relating to imperial decisions can be found as early as the reign of Tiberius.[70] Given that such laws were already 'on the books' as it were, any such law handed down by Theodosius would hardly be a significant gesture, let alone represent any kind of real political victory for Ambrose.

The final and perhaps most compelling evidence that the 'Massacre of Thessalonica' represented a co-operative rapprochement between Theodosius and Ambrose is the bishop's rapid return from political purgatory following the incident. While there is no indication that Ambrose was behind the raft of anti-pagan legislation delivered by Theodosius around this time, we do find his influence in Theodosius' decision to pardon partisans of Eugenius following the Battle of the Frigidus River.[71] Ambrose would then go on to play a final role in the political life of Theodosius when he famously eulogised him 40 days after his death. The speech is vintage Ambrose, with the bishop manoeuvring to ensure his place in the new regime by emphasizing his own importance to the deceased emperor and the need to be loyal to his sons.[72]

This was a fitting end to a relationship that was not defined by shared faith, nor grand conflict between church and state but instead was centered on two strong willed individuals and their overlapping areas of influence and control. Before coming to Italy Theodosius was able to ignore the attempts of the ambitious Ambrose to meddle in the affairs of the eastern church. But once he reached Italy the situation radically changed. Theodosius was determined to ensure his family ruled the empire alone but to achieve this he needed to co-opt the western elites to support his cause. Ambrose, influential in a number of circles, could not be ignored. When Theodosius set up his court in Milan, the bishop quickly moved to ensure his own reach and influence in the new regime and at first his new emperor was keen not to offend him. But Ambrose went too far and transgressed the limits of Theodosius' tolerance for

interference in his political affairs. It was only the highly unique circumstances surrounding the Massacre of Thessalonica, and Ambrose's deft political instincts in assisting the emperor through its repercussions that allowed him to survive these transgressions.

In terms of its immediate effects, Ambrose and Theodosius' relationship was far less transformative than many have believed. Instead it has gained an oversized prominence thanks to our heavy reliance on the carefully curated works of Ambrose and the histories of his fifth century admirers, which we use to reconstruct many of the events of the period. That said, the relationship retains an importance because it illuminates some broader trends within Theodosius' reign. First, it shows the growing tendency of church leaders to involve themselves in imperial politics, something Theodosius' own policies in the east had encouraged and something he may have regretted when faced by an ambitious bishop who was not his own creation.[73] Second, the course of the relationship again highlights Theodosius' precarious political position in the west despite his crushing defeat of Magnus Maximus. The lengths Theodosius went to accommodate the troublesome bishop speaks to his awareness of this situation and a practical plan to curry the support he needed for his dynastic plans.

Even if we acknowledge that the relationship between Theodosius and Ambrose did not have as significant an impact on the course of the emperor's reign as has long been believed, the fact remains that our historical record has greatly elevated its importance. This in and of itself is noteworthy as the radical distortions of the relationship found in the sources would go on to be weaponised to great effect by the church in the perennial dispute regarding the boundaries of religious authority in the secular world.[74]

Notes

1 Greenslade (1954) and Schieffer (1972).
2 Paul. *V. Amb.* 3. McLynn (1994) 31–33 notes the paucity of source material on Ambrose's father and his career and argues that oft-repeated claims that Ambrose had noble ancestry at Rome are tenuous at best. For Ambrose's strong political connections see McLynn (1994) 49.
3 Paul. *V. Amb.* 4. For links within the Christian community of the city see McLynn (1994) 35. However, claims of the family having a martyred ancestor in the family need to be treated with caution (fn. 128).
4 Paulinus *V. Amb.* 5. Petronius Probus: *PLRE* 1, Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus 5.
5 For a good overview of, and background for, the situation in Milan see McLynn (1994) 13ff.
6 Paul. *V. Amb.* 3.6–9; Soz. 6.24; Soc. 4.30; Theod. *HE* 4.6; and Jerome *Chron.* a.374.
7 Paul. *V. Amb.* 7. Valentinian: Paul. *V. Amb.* 8.2–9.2 and Ruf. *HE* 11.11.
8 Palladius *Apol.* 120; McLynn (1994) 52.
9 On this period of Ambrose's career see McLynn (1994) 53–149.
10 McLynn (1994) 80ff. McLynn (1994) 79–80 and 148–149 does note that Ambrose's influence over Gratian was inconsistent. As an example, he notes (151–152) that Ambrose's role in Gratian's decision to remove the Altar of Victory from the

Senate House at Rome was minor. Errington (2006) 198–199 however emphasises its strength.

11 McLynn (1994) 124ff. Errington (2006) 197–198 argues that Ambrose turned the Council of Aquileia into a "hunt for heretics".

12 See pages 55ff in the current work.

13 This correspondence is usefully collected in Liebeschuetz (2005) 231–243. On Ambrose's claim to speak for all the bishops of Italy see Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 9 (13). At one point (*Ep. Extra coll.* 9 (13).8) he even tries to insinuate that he wrote on the authority of Gratian himself. On their support for Paulinus to become Bishop of Antioch see Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 9 (13).2. On their opposition to Nectarius see Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 9 (13).3.5.

14 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 8 (14) – the response to the lost letter of Theodosius is replete with ecclesiastical humble pie that tells us that the eastern emperor had been forthright in his views – "It was a cause of sorrow that the fellowship of holy communion between east and west was interrupted" (1–2) and "It is not I repeat for our own sake that we take this trouble. We are not pursuing our own interest. . . ."(3).

15 McLynn (1994) 158ff.

16 Paul. *V. Amb.* 11.1–2. On the relationship between Justina and Ambrose see McLynn (1994) 97–98 and 215–216.

17 Amb. *de ob. Val. Iun.* 28. McLynn (1994) 161.

18 Amb. *Ep.* 75 (21), 75a (21a) and 76 (20).

19 For a detailed discussion of Ambrose's relationship with Valentinian II see McLynn (1994) 158–219.

20 Amb. *Ep.* 75a (21).36.

21 Amb. *Ep.* 30 (24) details Ambrose's role as an ambassador for Valentinian II. In it (4) Ambrose quotes Magnus Maximus as saying that Bauto unjustly "roused barbarians against me" – a reference to the scratch forces of Huns and Alans the general managed to levy against a possible invasion. Later in the letter (8) Ambrose claims that Bauto led these troops into Raetia to stop an incursion by the Iuthungi. Magnus Maximus clearly saw it as a provocative threat to his own position. See Maraval (2009) 161–162 for a discussion on Bauto's role. On the reason for Ambrose's second embassy see Paulinus *V. Amb.* 19. See McLynn (1994) 160–163 for an overview of Ambrose's role as ambassador.

22 Ambrose must have had a diverse range of support – he had spent a long time in the imperial civil service and no doubt had strong connections among the military as well as the people of Milan. Potentially he also had support from groups such as the *negoiatores, honorati* and others. His support among these diverse groups was shown when the bishop successfully defied Justina's attempt to requisition a basilica for use by the Arians in the city. See McLynn (1994) 187–196. Particularly notable was the support of a group of Nicene troops – Amb. *Ep.* 76 (20).20–21.

23 Paulinus *V. Amb.* 19.

24 Errington (2006) 210.

25 Soz. 7.25.9. See also Theod. *HE* 5.17.9 for the supposed 'humbling' effect this had on the emperor.

26 McLynn (1994) 298, believes that this was a simple misunderstanding. I find this unlikely.

27 McLynn (1994) 261–262.

28 Amb. *Ep.74* (40).25 – although Ambrose may have been over inflating his influence with the emperor at this point, especially given Theodosius had determined on a policy of reconciliation for his own political ends. See also Symm. *Ep.* 3.33.

29 On the identity of the *comes orientis*, and the reason the issue was brought to the attention of the emperor see McLynn (1994) 298–299, fns. 26–27.

30 Amb. *Ep.* 74 (40) and *Ep. extra coll.* 1 (41); Paul. *V. Amb.* 22–23. For a useful overview of modern literature on the episode see Hahn (2015) 399, fn. 62. See also

McLynn (1994) 301 for the geographical locations of the disturbances and the fact that they were separate incidents.
31 Amb. *Ep.* 74 (40).6.
32 Amb. *Ep.* 74 (40).7.
33 Amb. *Ep.* 74 (40).11 "But considerations of public order are perhaps what influence you, emperor. What then is more important, a show of public order, or the cause of religion? Severity ought to give way to devotion."
34 Amb. *Ep.* 74 (40).8.
35 See Hahn (2015) 401.
36 Amb. *Ep.* 74 (40).33 "I am after all motivated by fear for you, and also for myself. It is the voice of a holy man that cries 'Why was I born to see the distress of my people?'"
37 As Liebeschuetz (2005) 100, fn. 4 notes, the very fact that Ambrose wrote a letter detailing his actions here tells us a lot about his mindset and aims in challenging the emperor. Paulinus *V. Amb.* 23 outline the public confrontation between Theodosius and Ambrose.
38 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 1 (41) – especially 1(41). 23.
39 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 1 (41).27–28 and Paul. *V. Amb.* 23.
40 McLynn (1994) 304 I believe wrongly downplays the incident.
41 See Liebeschuetz (2005) 96. McLynn (1994) 308 notes the significance of Ambrose's careful editing.
42 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 10 (57).4. McLynn (1994) 313.
43 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 11 (51).2.Here Ambrose reveals he isn't a part of the emperor's consistory and was physically absent from the court itself.
44 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 11 (51).5.
45 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 11 (51).4 tries to brush off the incident "Personally I am happy to leave it to you to deal with your passion."
46 One puzzling question regarding the source accounts of the Thessalonica incident is its total absence from Zosimus (and by extension) Eunapius. See McLynn (1994) 329, who believes it was an "artful reductionism" on the part of Zosimus.
47 Theod. *HE* 5.17–18. Larson (1970) 297 rightly throws up his hands and writes that "the evidence as it stands and as it is ordinarily represented does not basically represent what really happened."
48 The incident is recorded by Amb. *Ep.51* and *de ob. Theo.* 34; Ruf. *HE* 2.18; Paulinus *V. Amb. 7*; Aug. *Civ. Dei* 5.26; Soz. 7.25 (who incorrectly places it after the defeat of Eugenius) and Theod. *HE* 5.17. Much later we have Cass. *Var.* 9.30 and Malalas 13.43.
49 The dating is not completely secure. As Errington (1992) 452 notes it is possible to date the chain of events to 389 as opposed to 390. On balance I believe 390 is more likely and here I follow Doležal (2014) 92–93.
50 Soz. 7.25.3. There has been some discussion about the name of the dead general – see Doležal (2014) 92.
51 Soz. 7.25.4. Theod. *HE* 5.17.2; Ruf. *HE* 2.18.
52 McLynn (1994) 318.
53 Theod. *HE.* 5.17 "for you were the adviser of this terrible slaughter". Other sources are far more general. Paulinus *V. Amb.* 24 seems to blame the soldiers (comes) on the consistory while Augustine *de civ. dei* 5.26. simply blames people close to the emperor ("tumult quorundam, qui ei cohaerebant"). Amb. *de obitu. Theo.* 34 blames "others" for leading the emperor astray.
54 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 11 (51).6. Even though he was in disgrace Ambrose claims to have written to the emperor asking for clemency "an act which previously, in so many petitions, I had warned would be an atrocity…".
55 Soz. 7.25.1–3; Paulinus *V. Amb.* 24 and Theod. *HE* 5.17.1–4. Malalas 13.43 gives a total of 15,000 dead.

56 *Clementia*: Amb. *Ep.* 74 (40).13 and 32 specifically notes the emperor's actions with regards to Antioch and Constantinople. Aug. *Civ. Dei* 26 claims that Theodosius had promised "the Bishops" that he would pardon the city. Likewise, Paulinus *V. Amb.* 24 claims that the emperor told Ambrose the same thing. However, given his political calculations such a promise is highly unlikely to have been made. Butheric and Gothic troops: McLynn (1994) 317 uses Zos. 4.45.3 to argue that the troops under Butheric's command may have been undertaking 'counter terrorism' activities against rogue Gothic bands plaguing the area. We must note that we have no specific evidence for the ethnicity of the troops commanded by Butheric but there was likely to have been a significant Gothic component in his forces.
57 Soz. 7.25.4.; Ruf. *HE* 11.18. McLynn (1994) 320 believes that Rufinus has "transposed Theodosius' vengeance to the scene of the original crime".
58 Stated number: Soz. 7.25.4. See also McLynn (1994) 320–321; Doležal (2014) 104.
59 McLynn (1994) 321ff.
60 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 6 (12); Ruf. *HE* 11.18.
61 As expressed in *Pan. Lat.* 2 (12).24.1 "purple clad butcher".
62 It is interesting to note that two of the earliest accounts of the Thessalonica incident those of Augustine and Rufinus – do not actually mention any role for Ambrose at all. See McLynn (1994) 328.
63 Theod. *HE* 5.17.3–4. Likewise Ruf. *V. Amb.* 24, praised Theodosius saying "that he did not shrink from public penance, and the improvement that resulted from his amendment won for him a second victory".
64 King (1961) 69.
65 This encounter is most vividly described in Theod. *HE* 1–4. It is also found in Soz. 5.25.8 and the much earlier account of Paul. *V. Amb.* 24.2 – although the biographer is extremely broad in his description ("he did not allow the emperor to enter the church") – which of course could mean something other than a physical confrontation. See Schieffer (1972) 339–342 for the development of the myth of the confrontation at the cathedral door.
66 Amb. *Ep. extra. coll.* 11 (51).11.
67 Soz. 7.25.3–4 says that Ambrose did in fact excommunicate the emperor. That the bishop would take such a risky and 'final' action is extremely unlikely. Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 11 (51).13 more cryptically says that "I dare not offer the sacrifice, if you wish to participate." See McLynn (1994) 326 on how this statement has been misinterpreted.
68 Ruf. *HE* 11.18. Sozomen 7.25.8–9. Sozomen also notes that the emperor "refrained from wearing his imperial ornaments, as being inconsistent with a season of mourning". See McLynn (1994) 328.
69 Ruf. *HE* 11.18; Soz. 7.25.7; Theod. *HE* 5.17–18.; Cass. *Var.* 9.30 and Malalas 13.43.
70 *CTh.* 9.40.13. For further discussion see Errington (1992) 448–49 who notes that "the assumption that the first of these laws, despite all appearances, is wrongly dated in the Code, has acquired the status of a sacred cow, which has grazed its way through the thickest scholarly traffic since Gothofredus". See also Doležal (2014) 93, fn. 20 for a summary of the scholarly discussion on the matter.
71 Amb. *de ob. Theo.* 5, 12–14 and 16–17. See Chapter 9, page 140.
72 Amb. *de ob. Theo.* 5–8.
73 As Drake (2015) 305 notes imperial policies that had diverted resources to the church and given bishops important roles traditionally carried out by traditional elites placed the likes of Ambrose in a very strong position.
74 Brown (1992) 147.

8 *Malleus paganorum*?

An early indifference

Theodosius has been remembered as an emperor who accomplished many things, but nothing pervades our view of him as much as the idea that he was the one who dealt the death blow to Rome's tradition of polytheistic, or 'pagan' worship. This view is not a modern phenomenon and can be traced as far back as the months immediately following his death. Speaking in early 395, Ambrose claimed that Theodosius had "supplanted and banished the idols of the gentiles; who in his faith wiped out all worship of graven images and trampled down their ceremonies" (trans. Liebeschuetz). Some years later Rufinus states that Theodosius had completed a holy mission begun by Constantine: "The worship of idols, which, following upon Constantine's initiative, had begun to be neglected and demolished, collapsed during his reign"[1] (trans. Amidon). He was followed by Augustine, who wrote that "The idols of the Gentiles he everywhere ordered to be overthrown." Importantly, the pagan writer Zosimus ruefully confirms the negative impact Theodosius had on pagan worship. Zosimus says that during his reign Theodosius "besieged the temples of the gods in every part of the empire" and that "it was no longer safe for anyone to believe in their existence, or, in short, to look up to heaven and worship what he saw there"[2] (trans. Ridley). By the seventh century Theodosius was the emperor who had definitively "raised the shrines of the Hellenes to the ground".[3]

Given this pervasive posthumous reputation, we would expect Theodosius' reign to have been an unending crusade of legislation and punitive action against the old religions of the empire. However, even a cursory examination of the available evidence shows that Theodosius was not an unyielding opponent of paganism and instead took a far more nuanced and targeted approach to dealing with the empire's remaining pagans.

During the first decade of his reign Theodosius was far more restrained in his attitude towards paganism than he had been against the supposedly heretical doctrines of his own religion. In fact, in one of his earliest laws, he took a very respectful attitude towards a traditional cult noting that he had "acceded both to ancient custom and the constitutions of our forefathers" by allowing the City of Antioch to plant additional sacred pine trees. Three years later he

would legislate to protect pagan temples and artworks, although this was done under the guise of heritage conservation rather than religious observance.[4]

The few anti-pagan legislative forays of Theodosius' early reign were decidedly half-hearted. Between 380 and 385 Theodosius issued two rulings banning the practice of sacrifice for the purpose of divination. The first, delivered in 381, carried the penalty of proscription, the second, handed down in May 385, promised torture and death.[5] Despite the punishments they promised these rulings were hardly revolutionary, as numerous emperors had already banned the practice of divination and soothsaying.[6]

It is tempting to view even this paltry legislation as evidence that Theodosius was indeed the anti-pagan crusader that he is presented as by our Christian sources. However, the timing of these laws shows that they were driven more by political necessity than anything else. Emperors had always been suspicious of attempts to divine future events – particularly if they involved questions of imperial health and succession.[7] For Theodosius we can identify even more specific concerns that may have driven both pieces of legislation. In 381 Theodosius was still navigating the formative years of his reign. He was yet to end the Gothic crisis and was still viewed as a western interloper. In 385, he faced a new competitor in the usurper Magnus Maximus who had established himself in the west and was even threatening the regions ruled by Valentinian II. In both cases then, the emperor had good reason to remind his subjects that divination would not be tolerated.

Theodosius would hand down only one further piece of anti-pagan legislation during his first decade in power, a law confiscating temple properties and then placing them under the control of imperial officials.[8] Like the previously described legislation, this was not an unprecedented action and was most likely driven by economic need rather than any dedicated anti-pagan agenda. The law dates from 383, around the time of the emperor's quinquennial anniversary when he was expected to pay a sizeable special payment (*donativum*) to the army. Taking control of temple lands in the east, many of which were neglected with the waning of the traditional cults, was an easy option for the emperor. Unlike the west, where there remained a powerful and wealthy pagan aristocracy, that of the east was small and unorganised. Because of this Theodosius did not have to fear retribution for his land grab.

A contemporaneous source, the pagan philosopher Libanius, confirms that Theodosius had not implemented an anti-pagan legislative agenda during this period. Writing as late as 387, Libanius notes that Theodosius had not placed any additional restrictions on sacrifice, had not closed temples or even attempted to stop worshippers entering them. Despite Libanius' clear anxiety that such restrictions could one day be laid down, there is no reason to believe that his claims were fictitious. Using this contemporaneous source material, we can also reject the much later claim made by Sozomen that early in his reign Theodosius had forbidden entry to temples. Here Sozomen is retrojecting Theodosius' later anti-pagan legislation onto the early years of his reign in order to present the emperor as a vigilant enemy of paganism from the moment of his accession.[9]

Both Christian and pagan writers describe the emperor as tolerant in his views on paganism during this period. Libanius emphasises that even though the emperor believed his religion to be superior, he had refused to order pagans to stop worshipping the traditional gods.[10] He even stresses that pagans could still advance in the imperial court, free to take their oaths by the traditional gods.[11] This approach is confirmed by Gregory of Nazianzus, who wrote in the early 380s that Theodosius made no moves to compel pagans to abandon their faith but instead sought to persuade his opponents of the errors of their ways.[12]

Although Theodosius made no full-scale legislative assault on paganism in the first decade of his reign, he remained determined that Christianity not lose any ground among the wider population, and worked to this end by repeatedly legislating against apostasy. As late as 391 Theodosius was forced to legislate specifically against apostates of high rank – a clear indication that apostasy was a cross-class phenomenon.[13]

While Theodosius' legislative record does not support the idea of an emperor implacably opposed to paganism, the actions of some of the emperor's key subordinates during the 380s give us pause for thought. Between 384 and 388, the Praetorian Prefect of the East, Maternus Cynegius, not only turned a blind eye to the destructive rampages of anti-pagan monks but was himself present at the destruction of at least two major pagan sites. Libanius details the destruction of a temple somewhere on the Persian frontier ordered by an unnamed servant of the emperor, generally agreed to be Cynegius.[14] In a separate incident, Theodoret recounts that Cynegius accompanied the bishop Marcellus who intended to tear down the Temple of Zeus at Apameia. He is also recorded as having disturbed the religious practices of pagan worshippers in Egypt.[15] But was Cynegius acting on the direct orders of the emperor, or had he simply exceeded his remit and engaged in wilful acts of anti-pagan 'freelancing'?

Zosimus believes that Cynegius was acting directly on the orders of Theodosius. He says

> Cynegius, the Praetorian Prefect, sent to Egypt to forbid the worship of the gods and close the temples . . . (he) carried out his orders by closing the doors of the temples in the East, Egypt and Alexandria, and prohibiting centuries old sacrifices and all ancestral rituals.[16]
>
> (trans. Ridley)

However, given the lack of legislative evidence for such an agenda, it is likely that Zosimus (like Sozomen) is actually conflating this period with the emperor's later anti-pagan actions.[17]

The contemporaneous pagan view of Cynegius' actions offered by Libanius confirms that he was not acting at the behest of the emperor. Addressing Theodosius, Libanius says:

> However, on a careful consideration of the matter, this is none of your doing, but of the person that misled you, a scoundrel hated of the gods, cowardly and avaricious, and a plague to the earth that welcomed him at his birth.
>
> (trans. Norman)

Libanius heaps further scorn on Cynegius claiming that he was egged on by his wife. He finishes his tirade by widening his accusations – talking of a "cabal that has deceived and hoodwinked you".[18]

Theodoret's account of the assault on the Temple of Zeus at Apameia provides further evidence that Cynegius was not acting on Theodosius' orders.[19] Theodoret says that while Cynegius arrived at the temple with troops to support the bishop Marcellus, the Praetorian Prefect remained hesitant to order the attack on the temple and was therefore sent away by Marcellus who required god's supernatural assistance to destroy the temple.[20] Even taking into account that Theodoret's narrative is designed to both paint a hagiographical portrait of Marcellus and show the ineffectual nature of the 'old gods' in the face of the Christian god and his holy servants, it is telling that he does not give Cynegius (who by the fifth century was himself a revered Christian figure) any credit for the destruction of the temple. When we strip away the supernatural elements of the story, we find a clear echo of the actual political and legislative environment of the mid-380s.[21] Cynegius was happy to encourage the destruction of temples but could not himself directly participate. Nowhere does Theodoret say that the troops brought by Cynegius were involved in the actual destruction – instead this role is given to followers of Marcellus. This interpretation is further strengthened by Libanius, who in his discussion of the attack on an unnamed eastern temple says that Cynegius "sought influence with the renegades from the farms who claim to commune among the mountains with the creator of the universe", suggesting that the attack was undertaken by monks and not the regular soldiery under Cynegius' command.[22] There can be only one reason that Cynegius would not allow regular troops to attack pagan temples: he knew it was forbidden by the emperor.

Although Theodosius didn't actively sanction Cynegius' activities in the east, he cannot have been totally ignorant of his subordinate's activities and there is no record that he either punished Cynegius or reigned in his activities. In fact, with good reason, Cynegius has long been considered one of Theodosius' staunchest supporters. His rapid progression from obscurity to high office under Theodosius, including the consulship in 388, shows just how high he was in the emperor's favour.[23] However, even with the absence of punishment, and the revered position Cynegius held in the regime, there is still no evidence to suggest that he was undertaking an anti-pagan pogrom on the orders of his emperor. Of the very limited amount of anti-pagan legislation passed down by Theodosius during the 380s, only one was addressed directly to Cynegius, a law of 385 reinforcing the past ban on divination. And even then there is no indication that this law was handed down to Cynegius for any other reason than the large geographical remit of his role as Praetorian Prefect for the East.[24]

We are forced to return then to the indisputable fact that Theodosius' anti-pagan actions during this period were not even symbolically grandiose, let alone designed to have a significant practical effect on the operation of the traditional cults. Even Cynegius' unsanctioned activities were sporadic at best. Attacks against pagan sites in the east were exceedingly rare – instead most temples were simply gradually abandoned as pagan worship and structures diminished over time.[25] The idea that the emperor was mobilizing the powers of the state against pagans in the same way he had against heretical Christians in the first decade of his reign is unsustainable.[26] As late as the end of the 380s pagan practice remained widespread in the east, particularly in the countryside, something Theodosius was no doubt aware of.[27]

Whatever his true desires, Theodosius had not yet moved in a wholesale fashion against the traditional cults. While he was prepared to turn a blind eye to the actions of his more enthusiastic Christian supporters such as Cynegius, it is telling that upon the latter's death he did not seek to replace him with yet another fervent Christian. Instead he appointed the solid and reliable Flavius Tatianus, a pagan who subsequently moved to protect the temples.[28] Here Theodosius was reacting against the turmoil Cygenius had stirred up in the east. As in the west, where Theodosius had been politic in not discriminating against pagans following his defeat of Magnus Maximus (he even appointed a number of pagans to the highest echelons of his regime), he similarly could not afford to ignore the chaos that had been caused by Cynegius in the east.[29]

However, while Theodosius did not, or could not, actively move against paganism in a concerted fashion during the first decade of his reign, he did continue the policies of 'active neglect' adopted by many of his predecessors. Like Gratian, and probably Valentinian II, he does not seem to have taken the traditional title of *pontifex maximus*, a powerful symbolic indication of his distaste for the old ways.[30] Even more importantly, he continued the policies of his predecessors by starving the traditional cults of imperial funding. It was this economic neglect more than anything else that would have a devastating effect on the viability and relevance of paganism across the empire.

As a close examination of the evidence has shown, we cannot assume, as many of our Christian sources do, that because Theodosius ended his reign with a raft of anti-pagan activity that he had always had a burning personal desire to destroy the pagan cults. Theodosius had been quite prepared to take radical action early in his reign to impose his orthodox doctrine of Christianity on the east. If his personal convictions regarding the ongoing strength of pagan cults was so strong, why did he not deal with this 'threat' at the same time? The answer once again lies in the emperor's political calculations. Theodosius believed that moving decisively against the non-Nicene forces of the east would help him to stamp his authority on his new territory. But as far as the traditional cults were concerned, the policies of neglect best suited his purposes for now.

A new agenda?

In 391, Theodosius seemingly changed tack from his past approach with a series of what some consider to be ground-breaking anti-pagan legislation. These laws have subsequently been viewed as an important turning point in the religious history of the Empire and are the reason many consider Theodosius as the emperor who delivered the death blow to Rome's traditional cults.

There are three relevant laws to consider here. The first two can be dealt with together –while the third must be assessed separately. The first law was delivered on 24 February 391 to the Prefect of Rome, Ceionius Rufius Albinus. A second, very similar law, was handed down on 16 June 391 and addressed to two officials based in Alexandria, the *praefectus augustalis* Evargius and the Count of Egypt (*comes aegypti*) Romanus. Both laws banned blood sacrifice but also prohibited anyone from visiting temples for the purposes of worship. The laws also forbade the worship of images: one would assume those found at temples and shrines. They then went on to specifically target provincial governors (*judices*) with a fine of fifteen pounds of gold should they attempt to enter a temple. In the law handed down in Rome, lower ranked officials were to pay lesser amounts.[31]

Although on their surface these laws seem revolutionary, closer inspection shows that much of their content was not new. Prohibition of blood sacrifice dated back to the House of Constantine, and in reality, the economic withdrawal of state funds for pagan cults meant that the practice had already been largely discontinued.[32] The sons of Constantine had also handed down laws banning entry to temples, while Constantius II had banned the worship of images on pain of death. Given this precedent, the punishments handed down by Theodosius for the same 'crime' were relatively benign.[33]

Importantly both laws also had a very limited geographic scope. Given that the first was addressed to the Prefect of Rome and the second to officials based at Alexandria, it is reasonable to assume that these cities alone were the intended targets. There is no evidence that either law was applied to other cities, let alone distributed throughout the western half of the empire.[34] Also noticeable is that both laws were heavily concerned with trying to stop imperial officials from undertaking pagan ritual. These factors suggest that the two laws were not the beginning of a long-planned assault by Theodosius on paganism but instead were "the government's response to a specific request . . . (designed) to deal with a local situation". That is, both laws were likely handed down in response to requests for imperial assistance from disaffected Christian officials in two cities that still boasted powerful pagan parties, as opposed to an initiative driven by the emperor himself.[35] Rome was home to many powerful pagan senators while Alexandria had long experienced open religious discontent between pagans and Christians. Thus, while both laws were symbolically important in that they targeted two important cities with a significant pagan presence, they should not be interpreted as part of a major strike by a Christian emperor against pagan worship in the empire.[36]

The measured nature of this legislation again reveals Theodosius at his careful best. The laws were cleverly designed to signal to his western co-religionists that he was supportive of their agenda, while at the same time limited enough to avoid provoking widespread ire among western pagans (although the law aimed at Alexandria would have unforeseen consequences). The fact that we have no record of pagan officials asking for these laws to be rescinded demonstrates that they were not considered particularly onerous.[37] What's more, both laws were delivered on the eve of Theodosius' return to Constantinople. As Cameron notes, this "would have been a singularly poor moment to choose for a major anti-pagan initiative in the West".[38]

The third piece of anti-pagan legislation however was potentially far more consequential. It was issued from Constantinople in November 392 and said:

> No person at all, of any class or order whatsoever of men . . . shall sacrifice an innocent victim to senseless images in any place at all or in any city. He shall not, by more secret wickedness venerate his lar with fire, his genius with wine, his penates with fragrant odours; he shall not burn lights to them, place incense before them, or suspend wreaths for them.
>
> But if any man should dare to immolate a victim for the purpose of sacrifice, or to consult the quivering entrails, according to the example of a person guilty of high treason he shall be reported by an accusation which is permitted to all persons, and he shall receive the appropriate sentence, even though he has inquired nothing contrary to, or with reference to, the welfare of the Emperors. . . .
>
> But if any person should venerate, by placing incense before them, images made by the works of mortals and destined to suffer the ravages of time, and if, in a ridiculous manner, he should suddenly fear the effigies which he himself has formed, or should bind a tree with fillets, or should erect an altar of turf that he has dug up, or should attempt to honor vain images with the offering of a gift, which even though it is humble, still is a complete outrage against religion, such person, as one guilty of the violation of religion, shall be punished by the forfeiture of that house or landholding in which it is proved that he served a pagan superstition. For We decree that all places shall be annexed to Our fisc, if it is proved that they have reeked with the vapor of incense, provided, however, that such places are proved to have belonged to such incense burners.
>
> But if any person should attempt to perform any such kind of sacrifice in public temples or shrines, or in the buildings or fields of others, and if it is proved that such places were usurped without the knowledge of the owner, the offender shall be compelled to pay twenty-five pounds of gold as a fine. If any person should connive at such a crime, he shall be held subject to the same penalty as that of the person who performed the sacrifice.
>
> (trans. Pharr)

There are a number of noticeable elements to this law. First, it not only reiterated the ban on blood sacrifice but expressly noted that the prohibition related to all strata of society and not just high-ranking government officials. Second, and more groundbreaking, was that the law prohibited previously tolerated forms of sacrifice and ritual undertaken not only in the public sphere, but also in private. Also conspicuous was the focus on enforcement of the law, with punishments set out – including property confiscations and a large penalty of 25 pounds of gold. Theodosius even tried to ensure that the law would be impervious to incompetence and corruption with a penalty of 30 pounds of gold for judges who did not levy the correct punishments.[39]

It is significant that unlike the two western laws, which were handed down to officials responsible for individual cities, this law was addressed to the Praetorian Prefect, Rufinus, and thus applied to the entire Prefecture of the East.[40] So what were the circumstances in which this law was conceived? Why was it handed down and what did Theodosius actually hope to achieve with it?

The first issue to confront is trying to discern who was the architect of the law. Some believe it was not Theodosius, instead pointing the finger at Rufinus himself, believing he was seeking to either implement his own extreme anti-pagan agenda or was pursuing a personal vendetta against his enemies, the pagans Tatianus and Proculus.[41] While possible, this view relies too heavily on Rufinus' later career as a powerful and scheming court official who dominated the hapless Arcadius. Rufinus no doubt supported the broad scope of the law but it is unlikely he was its instigator. Instead, given that Theodosius had always been very careful not to create religious upheaval in the east between Christians and pagans, and that this law had real potential to do just this, it can only have come from the emperor himself.

But if this is the case, what did Theodosius hope to achieve and why had he engaged in such a *volte-face*? Was it a genuine effort to eradicate pagan practice throughout the east?[42] Or was the real intent of this seemingly radical law more subtle? Given that Theodosius had never before allowed religious fervor to override his own political requirements, the latter is far more plausible. Oddly, despite the series of penalties included in the law, there is no evidence that the law was ever actually enforced, let alone enforced successfully.[43] This suggests that the emperor may have had a more modest purpose in mind than the highly improbable likelihood of wiping out pagan practice in the east. His own distaste for pagan worship was no doubt a factor in crafting the law, but in the end he must have had a more attainable goal.

One suggestion for such a goal is that this law was actually designed to prevent religious discord between pagans and Christians.[44] The argument for this case is plausible. By enacting this law, Theodosius would satisfy his most ardent Christian supporters who wished to crush pagan practice once and for all. But at the same time the existence of such an expansive anti-pagan law would also serve to calm religious tensions as there was no longer a need for Christian hardliners to cause discord by physically attacking pagan sites in the hope of shutting down acts of pagan worship because the law had

effectively done this for them. As for pagan opposition to the law, the absence of an eastern equivalent to the still powerful pagan aristocracy of the west made such concerns largely irrelevant. Furthermore, the practical difficulties associated with trying to regulate the private behavior of citizens would mean that most pagans could simply continue to worship in traditional fashion as long as they were discreet in doing so.

Theodosius knew how difficult enforcement of this law would be and went to great lengths to remind his officials of their duties in this respect. Such efforts also served to signal to his Christian supporters that he was serious, even if he never actually expected that his law would be rigorously enforced. Given that public displays of pagan ritual were still happening as late as the sixth century, there was little chance that Theodosius could have successfully regulated private religious behavior.[45] Interestingly, within a year of Theodosius' death his son Arcadius handed down yet another law that sought to reinforce the precepts of his father's legislation. This also seems to have failed. In the short term at least, the law of 392 had clearly not been successful in its stated aim but as a closer examination has shown, this was likely never its real intent.[46]

The destruction of the Serapeum

If Theodosius did indeed use the law of November 392 to manage tensions between pagans and Christians in the east, it may have partly been because his earlier law of June 391 had inflamed religious tensions in Alexandria to such an extent that open warfare between the opposing sides had broken out culminating in the destruction of a famous pagan temple, the Serapeum. As its name suggests, the Serapeum was a temple dedicated to the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis. It had stood since the third century BC and was considered one of the most impressive temples of the empire.[47] It had for some time been a focal point for religious tensions within the city. In 360 the *dux aegypti*, Artemius, had attacked the Serapeum with imperial troops enraging the local pagan population.[48] This however was a mere prelude to what was to come under Theodosius. In the second half of 391 a series of events occurred which would lead to the violent destruction of the Serapeum in the early part of 392.[49]

Although accounts of the episode vary, we can reconstruct a basic timeline of events.[50] Matters began when Theophilus, the Bishop of Alexandria, received permission from Theodosius to occupy a building variously described as either a disused Arian basilica or a temple of Dionysius. There he discovered a number of underground rooms containing pagan ritual paraphernalia, suggesting that the space was being used for pagan rites. Theophilus then provoked the pagan community of the city by publicly mocking the objects and the rituals they were used in.[51] This led to pagan reprisals culminating in the death of a number of prominent members of the Christian community. Fearing revenge attacks from the dominant Christian faction of the city, pagan leaders barricaded themselves in the Serapeum complex taking a number of Christian hostages with them. Negotiations led by local officials to

resolve the situation failed, and subsequently an appeal was sent to Theodosius to intervene. The emperor wrote back to his officials (this correspondence is unfortunately lost to us) ordering both pardons and punishments but by this point the Christians surrounding the Serapeum could not be controlled and the entire temple complex was attacked and subsequently destroyed, to be replaced by a church named after the young emperor Arcadius.[52]

Despite its infamy, our knowledge of the affair is clouded by evidence that is highly emotive and incomplete. Christian sources attempt to highlight the violent conduct of the city's pagans while at the same time viewing the temple's destruction as driven by god's will. Conversely, the pagan writer Eunapius claims that the destruction was wrought by cowardly and impious temple-robbers, "their hands stained not by blood but by money".[53] Unfortunately, one of the most important aspects of the affair for our purposes, the role of Theodosius in the destruction of the Serapeum, is particularly difficult to discern.

Most sources note that Theodosius only became involved in the affair after it had already escalated to the point where the pagans had barricaded themselves in the Serapeum and the exasperated local officials asked for imperial intervention as a measure of last resort. [54] Socrates provides the only divergence from this narrative, saying that the entire episode actually resulted from an imperial directive:

> At the solicitation of Theophilus bishop of Alexandria the emperor issued an order at this time for the demolition of the heathen temples in that city; commanding also that it should be put in execution under the direction of Theophilus.[55]
>
> (trans. Zenos)

Here Socrates has clearly misinterpreted his source for the affair or simply wished to push the idea of Theodosius as an aggressive 'hands on' anti-pagan emperor.

The request for imperial intervention made by the officials of Alexandria is telling as it demonstrates that even at this late stage in Theodosius' reign his senior officials remained reluctant to use military force against the pagans. In turn such an attitude can only reflect the fact that the emperor himself had no real enthusiasm for the overt use of military force to aid Christians in religious disputes with their pagan neighbours.[56]

Theodosius' response to the request for intervention primarily attempted to ensure that order was maintained in the city. He proclaimed the Christian dead as martyrs but also pardoned the pagan rioters – a significant concession on his part. He did however demand that the cause of the dispute be destroyed. Sozomen says that this was the Serapeum itself and writes that the emperor ordered "the temples in Alexandria (to be) destroyed because they had caused the disturbances among the people".[57] Rufinus, however, who is the earliest source we have for the episode, is more ambiguous, saying that the emperor ordered that "the cause of the evils and the roots of the discord which had risen up in defence of the idols should be

extirpated completely, so that once these were eliminated, the reason for the conflict might also disappear"[58] (trans. Amidon).

Given there is no surviving law from this period ordering the destruction of pagan places of worship or ritual paraphernalia, some have asked whether Rufinus and Sozomen are referring to the law of 16 June 391? This is very unlikely. While this law was indeed handed down to the two officials who would then go on to petition the emperor, it does not provide for the destruction of any pagan place of worship or indeed any cult objects and cannot therefore be the rescript referred to by our sources.[59] Instead, given it was handed down in June 391 it most probably pre-dates the disturbances and may have even emboldened the likes of Theophilus who sought conflict with the pagans of Alexandria. Certainly, given the episode began in the second half of 391, the likelihood of such a causal link is strong.[60]

So, what did Theodosius actually order in this lost rescript? Was it as Sozomen claims the destruction not only of the Serapeum but other temples throughout Alexandria? Or did he simply wish (as Rufinus argues) that the cause of the dispute be destroyed? Given that only six months earlier Theodosius had handed down a law that did not even hint at a policy to destroy any pagan place of worship, let alone multiple sites, it is very unlikely that he explicitly ordered the destruction of the Serapeum. Instead, Rufinus' narrative is to be preferred as the more practical and plausible, in that it aligns with what we know of Theodosius' cautious approach towards pagan places of worship.

In his account, Rufinus goes on to say that after the emperor's orders were read out, a soldier attacked a great statue of Serapis within the temple complex – seemingly to carry out the imperial will.[61] It was only after this occurred that other pagan temples in Alexandria were attacked, and even then Rufinus ascribes this to the city's "most vigilant priest" rather than the emperor's orders.[62] It is easy then to see how later sources could misinterpret Rufinus and his account of the emperor's actual wishes, especially given that his narrative places the destruction of the Serapeum directly after the emperor's orders to his officials were read aloud. Instead it is far more likely that Theodosius simply ordered the destruction of the statue within the Serapeum (something strongly suggested by Rufinus) and that local Christian leaders led by Theophilus subsequently used the incident to engineer the widespread destruction of local pagan sites, including the Serapeum, at the hands of an enraged Christian mob.

Theodosius and 'the end of paganism'

We began this chapter by noting that a range of Christian sources viewed Theodosius' reign as a watershed moment in the growth of Christianity and in the corresponding decline and destruction of paganism. Leaving aside the simple fact that paganism was not 'destroyed' in Theodosius' reign, it is exceedingly strange that these same sources do not specifically demonstrate how Theodosius personally made this come about.[63] In particular, they do not emphasise his legislative agenda in their praise of his supposed anti-pagan

crusade. It is possible this is because they did not wish to paint Theodosius as an emperor who *forced* pagans to change their faith but instead as an emperor who was symbolic of the inevitable victory of god's plan for the empire. There is, however, a more likely answer. While it is undeniable that Theodosius' reign represents (to use Cameron's phrase) a crucial "tipping point" in the religious balance of the empire his *active* contribution to this decline, whether it be through legislation or by other means, was not overly significant. This is evident when we compare his modest 'anti-pagan' activities with his significant role in the doctrinal disputes within the Christian church.

We can even find support for this position by a close reading of some of our Christian sources. At the beginning of the chapter we quoted Rufinus – who said "The worship of idols, which, following upon Constantine's initiative, had begun to be neglected and demolished, collapsed during his reign." It is telling that Rufinus, who wrote only a few years after Theodosius' death, was unable to point to an action, or piece of legislation that Theodosius enacted to cause this decline. Instead he simply notes that paganism continued to crumble *during* his reign.

Such a distinction is important. While Theodosius' reign was not a period of frantic anti-pagan activity on the part of the emperor it was a period in which paganism continued its decline as a binding social, cultural and political force within the empire. Theodosius contributed to this decline by continuing past policies of imperial neglect towards paganism, particularly in withholding financial support to the traditional cults. By virtue of his lengthy rule alone, Theodosius was thus able to passively contribute to the rapid decline of paganism in the empire. Of course the emperor had an impact in other ways as well. His active adherence to Christianity would have made the old religions far less attractive and politically relevant for those seeking position and imperial favour, thus further exacerbating their decline.

Even though Theodosius was perceived to be in close alliance with the Christian church, we cannot point to a coherent or even sustained active anti-pagan program on his part. While the emperor was not shy in proclaiming his own religious proclivities, he never advertised himself as a destroyer of paganism. For example, if we were to try and judge Theodosius' role in the ongoing struggle between pagans and Christians via his coinage, we would be seriously disappointed. Apart from standard occurrences of the labarum, a symbol itself whose meaning remained ambiguous at this stage, there is nothing to suggest that Theodosius saw himself as an avenging Christian warrior cleansing the empire of the last remnants of pagan belief.[64] We will never know whether Theodosius secretly longed to unleash such an anti-pagan pogrom but the fact remained he did not. Such excesses did not suit an emperor that above all sought political stability for himself and his heirs. His actions in relation to the empire's pagans were like those in so many other areas of his reign, driven by necessity but always targeted, tactical, and nuanced.

Notes

1 Amb. *De Obitu Theodosii* 4. Aug. *Civ. Dei* 5.26; Ruf. *HE* 11.19 and Prud. *Per. 2.* 473–84. Theod. *HE* 5.20 takes a similar line to Rufinus saying that while Constantine had acted commendably some of his successors, in particular Valens had not been as vigilant and had allowed paganism to return "Now the right faithful emperor diverted his energies to resisting paganism, and published edicts in which he ordered the shrines of the idols to be destroyed. Constantine the Great, most worthy of all eulogy, was indeed the first to grace his empire with true religion; and when he saw the world still given over to foolishness he issued a general prohibition against the offering of sacrifices to the idols. He had not, however, destroyed the temples, though he ordered them to be kept shut. On the accession of Jovian he once more placed an interdict on the worship of idols, and Valentinian the Great governed Europe with like laws. Valens, however, allowed everyone else to worship any way they would and to honour their various objects of adoration. Against the champions of the Apostolic decrees alone he persisted in waging war. Accordingly during the whole period of his reign the altar fire was lit, libations and sacrifices were offered to idols, public feasts were celebrated in the forum, and votaries initiated in the orgies of Dionysus ran about in goat-skins, mangling hounds in Bacchic frenzy, and generally behaving in such a way as to show the iniquity of their master". Theodosius had rectified this: "When the right faithful Theodosius found all these evils he pulled them up by the roots, and consigned them to oblivion" (trans. Jackson).

2 Zos. 4.33.4 – this however would seem to contradict Zos. 4.27.2: "they were still allowed to frequent the temples and worship the gods according to ancient custom" (trans. Ridley).

3 *Chron Pasch*. a.379. Similarly, Malalas 13.37 writing in the late sixth century claimed that "Theodosius razed all the shrines of the Hellenes to the ground. He also destroyed the large and famous temple of Helioupolis, known as Trilithon, and made it a church for the Christians" (trans. Jeffreys).

4 *CTh.* 10.1.12. See also Vanderspoel (1995) 195. *Heritage preservation: CTh*. 16.10.8 which notes that a temple under the jurisdiction of the *dux osrohoene* Palladius (probably located at Edessa) be kept open with the objects contained within to be "measured by the value of their art rather than by their divinity" – see King (1961) 72, fn. 3–4. The existence of this law suggests that it had previously been closed – perhaps by a zealous local official.

5 *CTh*. 16.10.7 "If any madman or sacrilegious person, so to speak, should immerse himself in forbidden sacrifices, by day or by night, as a consulter or uncertain events, and if he should suppose that he should employ, or should think that he should approach, a shrine or a temple for the commission of such a crime, he shall know he will be subjected to proscription, since we give warning by our just provision that god must be worshipped by chaste prayers and no be profaned by dire incantations." *CTh.* 16.10.9 "No mortal shall assume the audacity of performing sacrifices, so that by the inspection of the liver and the presage of the entrails of the sacrificial victims, he may obtain the hope of a vain promise, or, what is worse, he may learn the future by an accursed consultation. The torture of a very bitter punishment shall threaten those persons who, in violation of our prohibition, attempt to explore the truth of present or future events" (trans. Pharr).

6 Such practices had already been banned under Constantine and Constantius II – *CTh*. 16.10.1, 2, 4 and 5. See also Lib. *Or*. 30.7 and laws passed by Valentinian I and Valens against nocturnal sacrifice *CTh*. 9.16.7–8.

7 For specific legislation see fn. 7. See also Jones (1964) 962.

8 *CJ.* 11.66.4 "All the lands of the temples shall be in the charge and care of the comptrollers (*rationales*) of the Crown Domain, and shall, as always, be protected

by them with particular care and the yearly payments collected by them." See King (1961) 73, fn. 3 for the history of temple land confiscations.

9 Lib. *Or.* 30.8 and 52–53; Soz. 7.20.1. Errington (2006) 248–249 forcefully reminds us of the later myths that were weaved regarding Theodosius as a "super-orthodox emperor".

10 Lib. *Or.* 30.52–53. And we have evidence of cult activities continuing in the east during this period – see Fowden (1978) 62, fn. 7.

11 A good example from the mid-380s is the pagan orator Themistius, who served as prefect of Constantinople in 384. Later of course the likes of Tatianus and Arbogastes would rise high in the emperor's favour.

12 Greg Naz. *Carm.* II 1292–1304 – "I do not consider it good practice to coerce people instead of persuading them. . . . The emperor it seems to me, keeps this in mind, and to this extent keeps fear within bounds, winning over everybody gently, and setting up voluntary action as the unwritten law of persuasion." Lib. *Or.* 30.27–29 also specifically addresses the question of whether the emperor could force pagans to become Christians.

13 Apostasy: *CTh.* 16.7.1–5. Also in his cross hairs, as they were for emperors before him, were Manicheans and those who would practice magic – *CTh.* 16.5.15; 9.16.11 and 16.5.18.

14 Errington (2006) 236 argues that the most likely locations were at Osrhoene, Edessa or Carrhae.

15 Lib.*Or.* 30.44f; Theod. *HE* 5.21; *Cons. Const*. 388. For other targets of Cynegius anti-pagan activities see Maraval (2009) 199–200.

16 Zos. 4.37.3. See also Lib. *Or.* 49.3 who theatrically states that Cynegius attacked pagans "from the Nile to the Bosphorus".

17 Theod. *HE* 5.21 does likewise by incorrectly placing the actions of Marcellus and Cynegius at Apamea after Theodosius' anti-pagan legislation of 391. Likewise, we can discount Theodoret's claim that the bishop Marcellus "was the first bishop to use the law as a shield" in attacking the temple at Apamea. There is no evidence that any such legislation had been handed down.

18 Lib. *Or.* 30.46–47. Of course, it would be difficult for Libanius to place blame on the emperor directly. But accusing him of being hoodwinked was no less dangerous and therefore is probably accurate.

19 Theod. *HE* 5.21.1 – as noted by Errington (1997b) 408. See also Fowden (1978) 64–65.

20 Theod. *HE* 5.21 – "Now there had arrived at Apamea the Prefect of the East with two tribunes and their troops. Fear of the troops kept the people quiet. An attempt was made to destroy the vast and magnificent shrine of Jupiter, but the building was so firm and solid that to break up its closely compacted stones seemed beyond the power of man; for they were huge and well and truly laid, and moreover clamped fast with iron and lead. When the divine Marcellus saw that the prefect was afraid to begin the attack, he sent him on to the rest of the towns; while he himself prayed to God to aid him in the work of destruction" (trans. Jackson).

21 See Errington (2006) 306, fn. 64 for a discussion on why Theodoret does not specifically name Cynegius in his narrative here.

22 Lib. *Or.* 30.48. Another episode, containing Marcellus alone, is recorded by Soz. 7.15.12, who says the bishop attacked a number of other pagan sites around Apamea, probably as a direct result of his success in attacking the temple of Zeus. To conduct these attacks the bishop had at his disposal a body of what Sozomen calls "soldiers and gladiators". As Fowden (1978) 66–67 notes, this does not seem to represent a regular army unit and it is more likely that the bishop had gathered local Christian soldiers and other fighters who were willing to attack pagan sites without direct orders from military officials. Furthermore the fact that a pagan

mob managed to kill the bishop during the attack shows we are not dealing with a well-disciplined regular body of soldiers.

23 See *PLRE* 1, Cynegius Maternus 3. On his family links see Matthews (1975) 110ff. His career progression included the roles of *comes sacarum largitionem, quaestor sacri palatii* and of course *praetorian praefectus orientis.*

24 *CTh*. 16.10.9.

25 Jacobs (2012) 125–126.

26 A claim made by Fowden (1978) 63.

27 *CTh*. 12.1.112.

28 Maraval (2009) 200.

29 We also must not forget that Theodosius had raised many pagans in the east to significant positions in his regime – including as tutor for his son Arcadius. See Chapter 3 in the current work.

30 As Errington (2006) 305, fn. 50 notes this is actually a 'argumentum ex silentio' as we have no evidence either way. However, given this decision is not noted in any of our sources (Christian or otherwise) showing that this decision (if it happened) was uncontroversial – Errington (2006) 234.

31 *CTh*. 16.10.10 (Rome) – "No person shall pollute himself with sacrificial animals; no person shall slaughter an innocent victim; no person shall approach the shrines, shall wander through the temples, or revere the images formed by mortal labour, lest he become guilty by divine and human laws. Judges also shall be bound by the general rule that if any of them should be devoted to profane rites and should enter a temple for the purpose of worship anywhere, either on a journey or in the city, he shall immediately be compelled to pay fifteen pounds of gold, and his office staff shall pay a like sum with similar haste, unless they resist the judge and immediately report him by a public attestation. Governors with the rank of consular shall pay six pounds of gold each, their office staffs a like amount; those with the rank of corrector or of praeses shall pay four pounds each, and their apparitors, by equal lot, a like amount." *CTh.* 16.10.11 (Alexandria) "No person shall be granted the right to perform sacrifices; no person shall go around the temples; no person shall revere the shrines. All persons shall recognize that they are excluded from profane entrance into temples by the opposition of Our law, so that if any person should attempt to do anything with reference to the gods or the sacred rites, contrary to Our prohibition he shall learn that he will not be exempted from punishment by any special grants of imperial favour. If any judge also, during the time of his administration, should rely on the privilege of his power, and as a sacrilegious violator of the law, should enter polluted places, he shall be forced to pay into our treasury fifteen pounds of gold, and his office staff a like sum, unless they opposed him with their combined strength" (trans. Pharr).

32 Past legislation can be found at *CTh*. 16.10.2–6. Zos 4.59.3 traces the decline of pagan ritual to when the state stopped providing funds "ceremonies were not ritually accomplished if the State did not pay for them". The reign of Gratian is commonly held to be a turning point in State support for the traditional cults – see Cameron (2010) 39ff and 65ff. On sacrifice Bradbury (1995) 331–356.

33 *CTh*. 16.10.4 – a law first handed down in 346, and then again in 354 and 356.

34 It is of course possible, but very unlikely, that similar laws were sent out to a range of officials and that only two of them were included in the Theodosian Code. That said, given that *CTh* 16.10.12 (392), was directed to the Praetorian Prefect of the East, and reproduced in the Theodosian Code one wonders why any 'western wide' equivalent to this law was not also reproduced? See Cameron (2010) 60–62. Maraval (2009) 248 claims that the law was sent to the Praetorian Prefect of the West – he does not however provide any evidence for this claim.

35 Cameron (2010) 62. While we do not know exactly which officials encouraged the emperor to enact these laws, some have seen the hand of western clergy in their

crafting. Errington (2006) 249 suggests "hyperactive Italian clergy perhaps via a contact with Theophilus". McLynn (1994) 331 however cautions against seeing the hand of Ambrose in this law.

36 Here I support Fowden's (1998) 553 view which is dismissed by Cameron (2010) 63.

37 See Cameron (2010) 68.

38 Cameron (2010) 64.

39 *CTh.* 16.10.12. The law concludes by setting out the emperor's determination that his will in this case be followed: "It is Our will that this regulation shall be so enforced by the judges as well as by the defenders and decurions of the several cities, that the information learned by the defenders and decurions shall be immediately reported to the courts, and the crimes so reported shall be punished by the judges. Moreover, if the defenders and decurions should suppose that any such crime should be concealed through favoritism or overlooked through carelessness, they shall be subjected to judicial indignation. If the judges should be advised of such crimes and should defer punishment through connivance, they shall be fined thirty pounds of gold; their office staffs shall also be subjected to an equal penalty" (trans. Pharr).

40 There is no evidence that a similar law was handed down to the Praetorian Prefect in the west. See Cameron (2010) 60–61.

41 Errington (2006) 247 sees the law as part of Rufinus' anti-Proculus activities. However, the law seems far too broad for such a specific purpose, especially given the existence of an actual law banning Lykians from taking public office (*CTh.* 9.38.9).

42 Cameron (2010) 61, fn. 121 provides a useful list of scholars who believe this to be the case.

43 On problems of enforcement see Cameron (2010) 72–73.

44 Maraval (2009) 256, also believes that the two western laws fulfilled the same function. As previously noted I have chosen to see a separate motivation for these two laws.

45 Cameron (2010) 65.

46 *CTh.* 16.10.13. A further piece of legislation from the following year (*CTh.* 16.10.14) revoked any remaining privileges held by pagan priests (*sacerdotes*).

47 The contemporaneous fame of the Serapeum is seen in Amm. 22.16.12 "There are besides in the city temples pompous with lofty roofs, conspicuous among them the Serapeum, which, though feeble words merely belittle it, yet is so adorned with extensive columned halls, with almost breathtaking statues, and a great number of other works of art, that next to the Capitolium, with which revered Rome elevates herself to eternity, the whole world beholds nothing more magnificent" (trans. Rolfe). See Ruf. *HE* 11.23 for a description of the building itself.

48 Fowden (1978) 59ff.

49 On the date of the entire incident see Hahn (2006) 368–383. More succinct discussions can be found in Maraval (2009) 351, fn. 33 and Errington (2006) 309, fn. 109.

50 A range of sources detail this episode – Ruf. *HE* 11.22–23; Soz. 7.15; Soc. 5.16; Theod. *HE* 5.22; Eunap. *fr.56* = *Vit. Soph.* 6.11.1–7. Amidon (2016) 464, fn. 40, offers a detailed overview of the affair and of some of the key issues and scholarship.

51 Arian temple: Ruf. *HE* 11.22. Temple of Dionysius: Soz. 7.15.2.

52 Soz. 7.15.10. The local officials who led the negotiations were probably Evagrius and Romanus, the recipients of Theodosius' law of June 391.

53 Eunap. *fr.56* = *Vit. Soph.* 6.11.1–7.

54 Ruf. *HE* 11.22 "Messages, however, were sent to them to remind them of the power of the Roman government, of the legal penalties, and of the normal consequences of behaviour of the sort, and since the place was so fortified that nothing could be done except by drastic action against those attempting such madness, the

matter was reported to the emperor." (trans. Amidon) Soz. 7.15.5 specifically notes one of the local officials as Romanus the *comes aegypti*.

55 Soc. 5.16.1.

56 We can contrast this reticence with Theodosius' willingness to use troops to ensure that Gregory was able to take up the Bishopric of Constantinople – see Chapter 4, page 55 in the current volume.

57 Soz. 7.15.7.

58 Ruf. *HE* 11.22.

59 As noted by Errington (1997b) 425.

60 This could be reflected in the claims made by a number of sources mentioning that Theophilus had received imperial permission in taking over the disused temple that sparked the entire conflagration. Note Errington (1997b) 427, fn. 145. As to whether Theodosius used this original piece of legislation as a 'dog whistle' to deliberately provoke an extreme reaction from the likes of Theophilus, this is very unlikely. As noted above the last thing Theodosius needed at this juncture of his reign was outright religious warfare in one of the most important cities of the empire.

61 Something rightfully suggested by Errington (2006) 250.

62 Eunap. *fr.56* = *Vit. Soph*. 6.11.1–7 supports Rufinus by laying the blame for the destruction of the Serapeum at the feet of Theophilus, Evagrius and Romanus, and not Theodosius. Given Eunapius' virulent anti-Theodosian bias this omission is significant.

63 Many emperors after Theodosius would continue to hand down anti-pagan legislation showing that at some level the old religions would stubbornly survive. A few examples include *CJ*. 1. 11.9.1, which denied pagans the right to inherit property and *CJ*. 1.11.2, banning pagans from teaching.

64 Labarum: *RIC* IX (1968) xli.

9 The final campaign

Securing the west

Theodosius left the west in the summer of 391, returning to Constantinople by 18 July.[1] The arrangements he had put in place there seemed secure. Arbogast had Valentinian II caged in Gaul, and evidence from the law codes shows that Theodosius was effectively ruling the strategically crucial area of North Africa directly from Constantinople.[2] The timing of his return was driven by political necessity. He had been in the west for over three years and was conscious of the need to return to his capital. Family concerns also weighed on his mind. During his absence, Arcadius had been in nominal command of the east under the trusted supervision of Tatianus. Leaving aside minor currents of religious disquiet, the east had remained politically uneventful in the emperor's absence.[3] Such calm is testament to Theodosius' success in ingraining the legitimacy of his family into the power structures of the east. However, there was some intra-familial tension when Arcadius banished his stepmother Galla from Constantinople sometime between September 389 and August 390.[4]

Theodosius had very little time to enjoy the fruits of his success. After returning to Constantinople he was again forced back on campaign – this time to deal with bands of marauding Goths in Macedonia.[5] Our only source for this episode is Zosimus who says that the Goths (the same group that Magnus Maximus had attempted to suborn prior to Theodosius' western campaign) retreated to inaccessible marshlands at the arrival of imperial forces from where they waged an effective guerrilla war. Only after catching a barbarian spy was Theodosius able to find the main barbarian force and decimate them. However, Theodosius ordered his army to rest and the barbarians were able to counterattack, nearly capturing the panicked emperor. The situation was only restored by the Master of Cavalry Promotus "who punished them properly for their madness".[6]

Although it is plausible that some sort of campaign took place around this time, it cannot be independently verified. The tone of Zosimus' account is suspect as the author uses the emperor's personal failures against the Goths as the catalyst for his supposed relapse into a life of indulgence and ostentatious spending in Constantinople.[7] However, the campaign is a useful reminder that while the Gothic agreement of 382 had served to stabilise the empire's borders it

had not completely solved the emperor's 'barbarian problem'. Theodosius still had to manage large numbers of Goths settled within the empire, all the while managing a changing political landscape. Magnus Maximus' rebellion had clearly affected his relationship with segments of the Gothic population, and this episode was a worrying signal of the disaffection that would reach breaking point in the years after Theodosius' death. Some months after Theodosius' campaign in Macedonia, Zosimus describes another incident in which Promotus was killed in Thrace while training troops.[8] Supposedly this was due to the conniving Rufinus, who paid barbarians to ambush him, but again more likely reflects the ongoing instability even after the agreement of 382.[9]

By November 392 Theodosius had returned to Constantinople from Macedonia and was finally able to take the opportunity to celebrate his successes. It is quite possible that the games and gifts that Zosimus takes as signs of Theodosius' excesses were actually part of the standard imperial celebrations for his military successes.[10] Around this time Theodosius' wife Galla gave birth to a daughter, Galla Placidia, who would go on to be a pivotal figure in the imperial politics of the next century.[11]

'The best laid plans . . .'

Theodosius' celebrations and his newfound stewardship of the west were short-lived. On 15th May 392 Valentinian II was found dead in his palace at Vienne. He was only 21 years old. Debate, fuelled by contradictory source material, continues to rage about the circumstances of his death. Some sources claim that Valentinian II was murdered by Arbogast, while others say that he took his own life out of frustration at his lack of autonomy. A third category are more circumspect and admit that the cause of the young man's death was simply unknown.[12] The closer to the event, the more uncertain our sources, which is not surprising given the sensitivity around Valentinian II's position in the regime. Rufinus shows that even in the years directly following the death there were already a number of different theories:

> The life of Valentinian . . . was brought to an end by a noose for reasons still unknown. There are some who asserted that it was due to a plot by his general, Arbogast, a view commonly held by the people. Others said that the general was innocent of the crime but had been the reason why the youth had gotten so angry that he was driven to the deed [suicide], namely because he had not allowed him completely free rein in governing since he was not yet of age.[13]
>
> (trans. Amidon)

Similar equivocation is found in the eulogy for Valentinian II delivered by Ambrose very shortly after the young emperor's death (see below). Stronger opinions however would follow, and despite differences in detail, nearly all held Arbogast responsible. Orosius says that Valentinian was killed by

Arbogast, who then conspired to present the death as a suicide.[14] Socrates and Zosimus are even blunter – they present the death of Valentinian II as a conspiracy between Eugenius and Arbogast.[15] Given this trend, one can't help but feel that over time the preferred narrative of the civil war victors – Theodosius and his sons – was one of murder.[16]

Rather than attempt to unravel the murky circumstances of his death, it would be easier to throw our hands in the air and simply note that Valentinian II's death sparked a rebellion that led to a new western emperor being declared, thus forcing Theodosius into another civil war. However, we must try and understand the manner of Valentinian II's death as it is crucial to understanding Theodosius' eventual response. For example, if Valentinian II was murdered, it is almost certain that Arbogast had pre-planned his usurpation. If on the other hand Valentinian II committed suicide, then the events that led up to the accession of Eugenius are cast in a very different light.

The few years in which Valentinian II lived under the watchful eye of Arbogast were extremely fraught. As he grew older, the young Augustus increasingly chaffed at being nothing more than a puppet emperor. Zosimus claims that Valentinian II even attempted to dismiss Arbogast, who arrogantly replied that he answered only to Theodosius. Philostorgius goes further and claims that Valentinian drew a sword on Arbogast in an outburst of anger.[17] Another (admittedly outlandish) story has Arbogast go as far as to remove the emperor's allies from his consistory including Armonius, son of the former consul Taurus, who was then supposedly killed while seeking the personal protection of the emperor.[18] While it is hard to believe the worst-reported excesses of Arbogast, all of which seem to be designed to support the case that he was prepared to murder Valentinian II to further his own ambitions, the friction between the two was no doubt real. Arbogast was tasked with ensuring that the young emperor could not establish himself as a viable long-term power in the west. Theodosius meant for Arbogast to be the young emperor's jailer and the politically astute Frank vigorously carried out his mission. For example, in late 391 Arbogast refused to allow Valentinian II to lead an expedition against barbarian raiders who had caused unrest in Pannonia and reached as far as the north of Italy.[19] Theodosius himself approved of the way Arbogast was managing Valentinian II, and even refused the latter's direct pleas to rein the general in.[20]

Arbogast himself is an intriguing figure. Our sources highlight his support among the army, his impressive generalship, a knack for building political alliances and even a disdain for corruption and wealth – something uncommon for those of his rank and origin.[21] All these qualities would be attractive to an emperor who needed a subordinate capable of maintaining an independent administration in his name. Perhaps even more importantly, and despite later revisions that portrayed Arbogast as an untrustworthy barbarian, he had up until the death of Valentinian II demonstrated strong loyalty to successive imperial masters.[22] He most likely first crossed paths with Theodosius in 380 when he had been sent by Gratian to assist the eastern emperor against the Goths. He then served under Valentinian II and loyally followed

him to Thessalonica following Magnus Maximus' invasion of Italy.[23] Arbogast would then use his significant military talents to help Theodosius win the subsequent campaign against the usurper. But the emperor didn't just have faith in Arbogast's military talents as he handed him the politically sensitive task of travelling to Trier to personally eliminate Victor, Magnus Maximus' son and heir. Arbogast's record of loyalty was enough to earn him the role as Valentinian II's guardian and supreme commander of the western armies and even then he served Theodosius well by campaigning across the Rhine against his fellow Franks.[24]

Given Arbogast's exemplary loyalty towards Theodosius, for which he had been rewarded with a position as the second most powerful man in the empire, the idea that he would suddenly 'go rogue' by murdering Valentinian II seems very unlikely, particularly for such an astute political player. In fact, without Valentinian II, Arbogast knew that his own position would be far more precarious. As a Frank he had no realistic chance of taking the crown for himself and would always need a proxy to express his power. Arbogast had no need to create his own puppet when he already had a weak and pliable emperor under his control.

Arbogast's actions following the death of Valentinian II show that he was not the architect of Valentinian II's death and had instead been caught by surprise. Eugenius was only installed after a four-month interregnum. During this time there was little connection between the two courts and Arbogast himself did nothing to denigrate Theodosius. Instead he oversaw a significant increase in coinage bearing Arcadius' likeness suggesting that he expected Theodosius' eldest son would be sent westwards to replace Valentinian II. Arbogast was clearly waiting for instructions from Constantinople, hoping that Theodosius would retain him as the protector of the west.[25] As for Theodosius, he did not know how to react to the death of Valentinian II. He was aware that Valentinian II had resented Arbogast but his inaction shows that he was not sure whether this was a case of suicide or the beginnings of a coup. This imperial confusion is evident in the funeral oration for Valentinian II delivered by Ambrose shortly after his death.[26] The content of his address shows that Theodosius had not yet reached a firm conclusion about the cause of Valentinian II's death. In it, the bishop is uncharacteristically vague, skirting around the cause of Valentinian's death, mentioning neither suicide nor murder but alluding to the troubled relationship between the powerful general and the emperor.[27] At this stage, Ambrose was not sure just how Valentinian II had died and more importantly was not sure what Theodosius was going to do with Arbogast. He was not yet willing to risk the powerful general's wrath – especially if Arbogast would go on to retain the eastern emperor's support.

In Constantinople, Theodosius was vexed at both the news of Valentinian II's death and as to how he should react. Zosimus says that first and foremost his reaction was one of grief for the young emperor: "(his) wife Galla disturbed the court with her laments for her brother. The emperor himself was overcome with grief and anxiety, since he was deprived of his colleague who

was only a young man and a near relation"[28] (trans. Ridley). However, given his past treatment of Valentinian II such grief was more likely to be political then personal, although his wife's reaction was no doubt more sincere. Theodosius' first concern was his delicate dynastic plan for the west. He had depended on Valentinian II remaining as a western figurehead until one of his sons, probably Honorius, was old enough to take power in his own right. He now faced a dangerous void. The last male representative of the House of Valentinian was gone and Theodosius could no longer call upon a useful puppet to help him tap into the residual well of goodwill that remained for the family that had ruled in the west for nearly three decades. Despite the claims of Eunapius, we have no reason to believe that Theodosius was immediately eager to go to war.[29] That said, his trust in Arbogast would have been severely shaken, even if he wasn't yet convinced that Valentinian II had been murdered as part of a planned usurpation.

We remain ignorant of Theodosius' communications with Arbogast during this period. Arbogast must have informed his master of the death but we have no record of Theodosius' crucial reaction. That Theodosius did not simply send Honorius westwards to take Valentinian II's place shows at least a measure of concern with Arbogast's loyalty. The most obvious course of action would have been to recall Arbogast to Constantinople, either to discern the truth of Valentinian II's death, or if he had made his mind up about the Frank's guilt, to remove him from his position. We have no explicit evidence of such an order being given, but it must have occurred. Theodosius was a cautious man and even if he wasn't convinced of Arbogast's guilt he could not afford to leave him in place.[30] For Arbogast such a summons to return east meant at best a loss of influence and power, and at worst a sentence of death.

Such an unenviable choice explains why Arbogast eventually decided to formally break with Theodosius and raise a puppet emperor to rule the west. Valentinian died in May of 392, while Eugenius was not raised to power until the 22nd of August 392. If Arbogast had successfully plotted to kill Valentinian II he would have had his chosen successor announced immediately.[31] Eugenius' accession was the result of the confusion, rumours, and imperial hesitancy that followed the suicide of Valentinian II, rather than the product of a pre-determined plot. Arbogast only hand-picked Eugenius to rule when he knew that his relationship with Theodosius was irretrievably broken.

Eugenius was an unlikely choice for Arbogast. He was the antithesis of a military man, who had spent his life largely in scholarly pursuits. He was originally a teacher of Latin grammar and rhetoric, before taking the position of *magister scriniorum* (essentially the emperor's chief secretary who dealt with imperial correspondence) in the court of Valentinian II.[32] Despite their differences, Arbogast and Eugenius enjoyed a close relationship, although this alone does not explain Arbogast's decision.[33] More likely was that Eugenius was an acceptable sop to the Gallic aristocracy. Moreover, Arbogast already had the loyalty of the western army – a fellow soldier, or indeed someone with any military capability at all, would only act as a potential competitor.

Usefully, Eugenius was also a Christian, although he showed no real animus towards pagans. Such a person was useful for a new regime that needed support from the pagans of the Roman senate but who also could not afford to offend the Christian hierarchy of the west.

Once Eugenius was acclaimed as Augustus, Theodosius' myopic dynastic ambitions made war inevitable. Eugenius sent at least two embassies to Theodosius seeking peace, both of which were rebuffed or given non-committal answers.[34] Theodosius was now committed to war and began planning in earnest for a new western campaign. On January 1st 393 Theodosius sent a public message that he had rejected Eugenius' legitimacy by refusing to share the coming year's consulship, and instead partnered with his general Abundantius. On 23rd January Theodosius formally raised Honorius, now eight years old, to the position of Augustus, a move that predictably was not accepted in the west.[35] Realising that Theodosius was preparing to take back the west by force, Arbogast and Eugenius recognised the need for action. Following a short visit to the Rhine frontier to renew treaties with the Franks and Alamanni, the duo moved then into Italy, perhaps in the hope that such an aggressive move would cause Theodosius to second-guess his own plans. Militarily speaking, Arbogast now controlled the critical central juncture of the empire and could prepare for either a defensive response to Theodosius or if needs be a pro-active strike eastwards. However, despite securing Italy, Arbogast and Eugenius were unable to achieve any significant control in nearby North Africa, where Gildo either remained loyal to Theodosius or studiously neutral waiting for a victor to emerge.[36]

A pagan usurpation?

The regime of Arbogast and Eugenius was long cast as a last gasp stand by the pagan minority against the inevitable tide of Christian supremacy.[37] In recent decades however this view has been increasingly rejected as an invention of our more excitable Christian sources. The first thing to acknowledge is that the rebellion launched by Arbogast was born out of politics, not religious discontent. As we have seen, Theodosius had promoted leading pagans into his regime and his few pieces of 'anti-pagan' legislation had not caused widespread outrage. Powerful pagans in the west may have been willing to support the usurpers, but it wasn't out of frustration with Theodosius' religious policies.

Similarly, the pagan character of Eugenius' regime has been vastly overstated. Nowhere is this more evident than in its leadership, which was no more 'pagan' than that of Theodosius. Despite Sozomen's snide claim that Eugenius was "by no means sincere in his profession of Christianity", and the post-Frigidus River exhortations of Ambrose who in a letter to Theodosius says that the dead usurper "had polluted himself with sacrilege", Eugenius himself was almost certainly a Christian.[38] If Arbogast had indeed used Theodosius' anti-pagan actions to justify his rebellion, Eugenius was an

extremely strange choice of figurehead. As for Arbogast himself, despite serving Theodosius loyally and rising to the highest levels in his decidedly Christian regime, he has unfairly been painted as a 'pagan activist'. It's a case constructed on a small amount of suspect evidence. Most famously, Paulinus makes Arbogast a close confidant of the pagan Praetorian Prefect Flavius Nicomachus, with the duo supposedly pressuring Eugenius to restore state subsidies to pagan cults and then threatening to "turn the Basilica of Milan into a stable, and enlist clergy in the army". Much later, Orosius states that Arbogast was devoted to worshipping idols. Taken together, this is an overtly partisan portrait of Arbogast that does not reflect his career as a whole or for that matter his activities during the short-lived regime he helmed.[39]

For all the bluster about Eugenius leading a pagan regime, only one individual can realistically be considered a 'pagan leader' in any active sense: the Praetorian Prefect and Consul Nicomachus Flavianus.[40] But even then Flavianus was not appointed to this key position because of his pagan pedigree. His real importance lay in the fact that he had previously held the same position under Theodosius, and had now changed sides. For the usurpers he was a symbolically powerful figure they could employ to sway the sentiments of his senatorial colleagues and win their much-needed support.

Assessing whether Flavianus used his position to impose some sort of pagan agenda on the west is complicated by sources that portray him as an impious villian who unleashed an orgy of pagan sacrifice in Rome. Not surprisingly the evidence for such a portrayal does not stand up to close examination. The easiest to dispose of is the *Carmen Contra Paganos*, the work of an anonymous Latin poet, who describes a fully-fledged pagan revival in Rome led by an unnamed prefect and consul. The official in this poem was long thought to have been Flavianus, but more recent research has shown that the poem does not refer to him at all.[41]

The other major source for Flavianus' supposed pagan agenda is Rufinus, whose vivid description of the Praetorian Prefect undertaking prophetic blood sacrifices to determine Eugenius' upcoming victory has been used to claim that there was a widespread return to pagan practice under his watch.[42] The idea that Flavianus would undertake traditional religious rites before an upcoming campaign is not controversial; in fact it would be strange if he had not. But to extrapolate a widespread pagan revival from this one act is unwise and goes far beyond the source. Also problematic is the way Rufinus deliberately juxtaposes Flavianus' actions with the pre-campaign prayers of Theodosius and the prophecy of the Christian hermit John, who had proclaimed that the emperor would win a great victory.[43] This deliberate contrast shows that Rufinus was more concerned with buttressing his narrative of a Christian triumph over paganism rather than providing a sober narrative of what actually happened as both sides prepared for war.

While Eugenius appointed very few pagan 'advocates', he did allow officials to be publicly supportive of pagan cults if they wished. Flavianus' son, also named Nicomachus was made Prefect of Rome and is recorded as rededicating a

temple of Venus. Also, the otherwise unknown *praefectus annonae* Numerius Proiectus may have rededicated a temple to Hercules in Ostia – although the evidence for this is now strongly questioned.[44] All in all then – the regime of Eugenius does not seem to have filled with pagan luminaires.

The final, and perhaps most significant charge of pagan sympathies that has been laid against the usurpers was that they reinstated state funding for the pagan cults that had been revoked under Gratian. The case for this is mainly based on a letter written by Ambrose to Eugenius in 394 explaining why he had left Milan prior to the usurper's entry into Italy.[45] After laying out his role in ensuring that past efforts to restore funding to the state cults were defeated the bishop says that "when your clemency (Eugenius) assumed the reins of government we learnt that these benefits were subsequently granted to men pre-eminent in the state, but pagans in their religious observance" (trans. Liebeschuetz). It was this action, says Ambrose, that meant he could not in good conscience meet with the emperor or accept his gifts to the church.

A close reading of the letter however reveals that Ambrose never specifically states that Eugenius reinstated imperial funding for the pagan cults. In fact he explicitly says that "when you had become emperor envoys petitioned you to make restitution to the temples; you did not do it. The demand was made a second time by others, you resisted. . . ." What Ambrose does complain about is that Eugenius eventually offered *dona* (gifts) to those same petitioners (the pre-eminent pagans mentioned above), that Ambrose believed would then be used to finance cult activity ("did you really think it was right to make the gift to the very men who were making the petition?")[46] (trans. Liebeschuetz).

Clearly, Eugenius did not directly reinstate the funding – otherwise Ambrose would have directly accused him of it. Even after Eugenius' execution all Ambrose was prepared to say was that Eugenius was "contaminated with sacrilege".[47] It is a vague charge at best. As for the gifts that Ambrose mentions were given to the envoys, there was nothing strange in a new emperor distributing such payments, whether to the army or to key civilian supporters. As Ambrose notes the envoys were high-ranking members of Rome's senatorial elite and Eugenius would need their ongoing support if his nascent regime was to survive. These gifts were nothing more than elements of a time honoured practice designed to assure the loyalty of important figures ahead of an inevitable clash with an imperial competitor.

Ambrose's letter is also the source of Paulinus' claim that Arbogast and Flavianus presented a petition to Eugenius to restore funding for the traditional state cults.[48] However, as Cameron notes it would be extremely odd for Flavianus and Arbogast to be members of a special mission to court from the Roman Senate given they were key members of the regime itself. Paulinus seems to have selected the only two 'pagans' he could find in the regime and inserted them into a confused narrative based on a misinterpretation of his original source.[49]

The final piece of evidence used to assert that Eugenius reinstated payments to pagan cults is Zosimus' claim that after defeating the usurpers Theodosius travelled to Rome where he removed state support for pagan cults. Given they had previously been revoked by Gratian, it has been assumed that this reference means that Eugenius must have restored them during his own reign. If true this would be compelling evidence, but Zosimus' claim is flawed. For one, Theodosius did not visit Rome after his victory. What's more the references to imperial support for the cults are anachronistic and clearly refer to Gratian's much earlier actions.[50]

It is clear then that Eugenius and Arbogast did not take any significant actions designed to either weaken Christianity or to significantly aid the pagan 'cause'. Instead they were prisoners of a complicated political reality in which they could not afford to alienate either influential pagan senators or the growing Christian community of the west. While the regime was prepared to turn a blind eye to individual expressions of pagan adherence both within their administration and more widely among the senatorial class, this was only because the support of this class was crucial to their long-term claims of legitimacy. If anything Eugenius and Arbogast were obsessed with one and one thing only: preparing for the inevitable conflict with their powerful eastern rival.

The final campaign

With characteristic determination Theodosius was undeterred by Arbogast and Eugenius' sudden move into Northern Italy and by mid-394 he was ready to move against them. Although he possessed an army reinforced by elements of the defeated forces of Magnus Maximus, Theodosius was still heavily reliant on barbarian recruits. To prepare for the upcoming campaign the emperor held banquets to honour prominent barbarian leaders who would marshal the additional military strength he needed. At one such banquet two leaders, Fravitta and Eriulphus, came into vigorous disagreement about whether they should fulfil the oaths they made to provide military service to Rome, most probably as part of the agreement of 382.[51] Fravitta and others like him who were determined to keep their oaths, must have won the debate as a significant contingent (perhaps as many as 20,000) of barbarians, including Goths, Huns, and Alans, joined the invasion force.[52] Despite their heavy involvement in the fighting, this battle does not provide evidence that Theodosius allowed barbarians to fight in their own tribal units separate from the standing army. As in the campaign against Magnus Maximus, the barbarian troops that fought at the Frigidus River were led by Roman commanders and not their own chieftains.[53] Despite its impressive size there does not seem to be anything particularly revolutionary about the contingent. In marshalling these allies Theodosius was simply following a long-held military tradition of employing barbarian troops on campaign.[54] Overall Theodosius' army was in safe hands. The veteran commander Timasius was appointed Master of Soldiers and was assisted by Theodosius' nephew-in-law Stilicho, who would become the future lynchpin of Honorius' regime.

Before departing on campaign Theodosius again made careful political arrangements for the east. Arcadius was left in Constantinople to serve as a physical reminder of the dynasty's dominance, this time under the stewardship of the Praetorian Prefect Rufinus, who had supplanted Tatianus after a bitter struggle. Honorius, the presumptive replacement for Valentinian II was also left behind, probably for his own safety, but also because Theodosius did not want his campaign to be perceived as an attempt to place his son on the western throne.[55] The protective attitude Theodosius had towards both his sons was accentuated by the sudden death in childbirth of his wife Galla shortly before the campaign began. With his dynastic plans now relying solely on his two living sons he would not do anything to risk either's life.[56]

Theodosius left Constantinople by mid-May 394. His journey westwards followed the path he had taken against Magnus Maximus and included stays at Adrianople and Sirmium.[57] Arbogast, aware of the most likely route that Theodosius would take, had set his army in a strong defensive position blocking the main route into Northern Italy from Pannonia. The two forces met in a valley of the River Frigidus (River Vipava) for a confrontation that was to last two full days (5th and 6th of September 394) and would in one fell swoop dictate the course of the entire war.

Retracing the course of this pivotal battle is difficult. Leaving aside the usual contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in trying to reconstruct the ebb and flow of any ancient battle, and we discover that our sources are more concerned with describing an apocalyptic conflagration in which Christian righteousness vanquished the pagan threat than with charting how the battle actually unfolded. In truth, most Christian writers were simply happy to use the battle as a convenient literary apogee to a shared theme of the inevitable triumph of their faith.[58] The fact that Theodosius' army was no more 'Christian' than that of Eugenius was of course ignored.[59]

Our sources use a number of mechanisms to achieve their desired presentation. First, the vast majority of accounts include at least one (and sometimes more) instances of supposed divine intervention during the battle. These include the tide of battle turning after Theodosius directly beseeched god for help, the appearance of a holy vision and perhaps most famously a divinely sent wind that blew the spears and missiles of Eugenius' army back on their own ranks.[60] Second, they link the western forces to acts of pagan devotion such as the now debunked claim that Eugenius and Arbogast used pagan iconography, including statues of Jupiter and standards bearing the image of Hercules, to inspire their army. Taken together, these claims do nothing except to obscure what really occurred during the battle.[61]

We do however, have enough reliable information to broadly reconstruct what remains the most decisive civil war battle since the Battle of Mursa in 351, or even the Milvian Bridge in 312. The two sides that faced each other across the valley at the Frigidus River were evenly matched. While Theodosius may have had a slight numerical advantage, Eugenius' forces enjoyed a tactical advantage as they were arrayed in a prepared defensive position along

the high ground. Theodosius would have to break these defences if he was to be victorious.[62] The battle began on the morning of the 5th September when Theodosius launched a determined frontal attack using the large barbarian contingents within his army. Fighting raged all day and his forces were unable to break through, leaving as many as 10,000 dead on the battlefield, including the general Bacurius.[63] The two armies withdrew for the day, with Arbogast's forces convinced they were on the cusp of a great victory. Conversely, the mood was sombre in the camp of Theodosius, and many Christian sources claim the emperor spent the night in holy contemplation, with some using this 'low point' in the emperor's fortunes to insert their claim that Theodosius experienced a divine message or revelation that would lead to his eventual success.[64]

It was late on this first night that the tide began to turn in Theodosius' favour. A detachment of troops that had been carefully hidden by Arbogast to block Theodosius' retreat agreed to desert the usurper's cause.[65] Fighting resumed on the second day with neither side gaining the upper hand until an intense gust of wind blew the spears and arrows of Arbogast's troops back on themselves causing chaos in their ranks. While most Christian writers present this wind as being divinely sent to aid Theodosius, we cannot simply dismiss their claims as fantasy. Cyclonic winds, often referred to as the 'bora', are an actual climatic feature of the region, meaning they could have occurred during the battle. That said, their actual impact on the fighting has probably been overstated for narrative effect.[66] With the western forces in growing disarray, Theodosius' troops finally broke through their battle lines where Eugenius was captured, taken before the emperor and summarily executed. His head was then placed on a pike and sent to Italy as a warning to any remaining partisans that their cause was hopeless.[67] Arbogast fled the battle and after a few days wandering in the mountains took his own life. Nicomachus Flavianus, who was also with the army, did likewise.[68]

Theodosius' victory at the Frigidus River ended the civil war in one fell swoop and yet again he found himself with a fragile hold over the entire empire. Stripping aside the many colourful, yet superfluous details of the battle provided in our sources, and we find more earthly reasons for Theodosius' victory. Theodosius had a far superior army, greater in numbers and, as it contained the flower of Magnus Maximus' former forces, superior in quality. He also was able to employ numerous talented field commanders and had the good fortune to escape a potentially lethal trap when a crucial contingent of western troops defected to his cause. Also, Theodosius once again showed that when needed he could be utterly ruthless in the pursuit of power. Not only was he bold enough to risk everything on one throw of the dice by marching directly on the usurper, but he ruthlessly used his large barbarian contingent as human cannon fodder to wear down the western forces on the first day of battle. It was yet another decision in his treatment of the Goths that would yield some immediate benefits but in the long term have unintended consequences.

An unexpected death

Immediately after the battle Theodosius moved into Northern Italy to re-establish his court in Milan, where he found himself facing a familiar political conundrum. While he could quite rightly advertise the military dominance of his House via coinage that proclaimed VICTORI-A AVGGG (see Figure 9.1), he still needed the support of the western civil and military establishment if he was to have any chance of maintaining long-term control of his newly re-conquered territories. Theodosius was also faced with deciding how he would rule his empire, alone, with his sons, or with the help of a proxy.

Just as he did after the defeat of Magnus Maximus, Theodosius judged that a policy of assimilation and forgiveness was the most practical way forward. He was encouraged in this approach by well-connected western figures such as Ambrose and Symmachus (both of whom had cleverly avoided being entangled in the usurper's regime), who wrote to Theodosius arguing that forgiveness should be shown towards Eugenius' supporters.[69] Even Zosimus, hardly an admirer of Theodosius, notes the emperor's *clementia* in the wake of his victory.[70] In reality, such an approach was Theodosius' only option given his immediate challenges in re-establishing control of the west. With the most senior figures of the defeated regime already dead, Theodosius could afford to be generous with his pardons.[71] Most prominently, he forgave Nicomachus Flavianus the Younger, who had served Eugenius as Prefect of Rome. Others who escaped significant punishment included Marcianus, the usurper's Proconsul of Africa. Augustine makes the suspicious claim that those pardoned were forced to become Christians, although it wouldn't be surprising if some did so out of sheer self-preservation.[72] However, and as we have seen, Zosimus' story that Theodosius returned to Rome in order to force the Senate to abandon their pagan ways and adopt Christianity *en masse* is far-fetched and can be safely ignored.[73]

Formal echoes of Theodosius magnanimous approach towards his defeated enemies are found in surviving laws. Although gifts of land from the usurper

Figure 9.1 THEODOSIUS 1, (obv) DN THEODO-SIVS PF AVG, pearl diademed, draped, cuirassed bust right, (rev) VICTORI-A AVGGG, emperor standing right, holding standard and Victory on globe, foot on captive. (RIC IX: Sirmium 15a)
Credit: With permission of wildwinds.com.

were to be returned to the public purse, legal decisions made during the time of the fallen regime were to stand and individuals who had served in the regime were allowed to keep their former rank and benefits. Importantly, the new regime sent a strong message to those involved with the usurper that their past actions would not be held against them. They were not to "sustain the brand of infamy or be polluted by any title of disgrace".[74] In short, good behaviour and loyalty to the victors meant that redemption and a future in the new political order was possible.

Theodosius' stay in the west was extremely short lived. After reaching Milan his health rapidly deteriorated, which could explain why in the final months of 394 he summoned his son Honorius to his side.[75] On 17th January 395, Theodosius was presiding over games to celebrate his recent victory when he was suddenly taken ill. He died that night, most probably from hydropsy. He was not yet 50 and had ruled for almost 16 years.[76]

Notes

1 We can trace Theodosius' progress eastwards via the location of laws he was issuing. From mid-July they start being issued from Constantinople. See Honoré (1998) 70.
2 See Leppin (2003) 256, fn. 65.
3 During his western absence there had been rioting formented by the Arian faction in Constantinople - see Soc. 5.13 and Ambrose *Ep.* 74.13.
4 Marcell. com. a.390.2. Even if this episode never happened it is a useful reminder of the inherent fragility of Theodosius' dynastic arrangements given the tender age of his principal heir.
5 On the timing of this campaign see Paschoud (2003) 445–446.
6 Zos. 4.48–49. On the troops suborned by Magnus Maximus see Zos. 4.43.
7 Zos. 4.50 ". . . he resumed his former way of life, with lavish feats, constant pleasures and ostentatious shows and horse races" (trans. Ridley). See Paschoud (2003) 447–448 for commentary.
8 Zos. 4.51.1–3.
9 Some have sought to conflate these incidents with two others that may have happened around the same time. Jordanes and Claudian (Jordanes *Get*. 524–5 and Claudian *de VI cos. Hon*. 105ff) mention of a confrontation between Alaric, the future sacker of Rome and the emperor Theodosius at the River Hebrus, where the emperor was forced to back down. A second incident sees Stilicho attempting to avenge the death of Promotus, cornering the Goths responsible but being forced to make peace with them due to Rufinus' tricking the emperor (Claudian *in Ruf.* 1.314ff and *de III cos. Hon*. 147ff). These incidents are problematic. We have no real evidence of Alaric's activities prior to 394 and Claudian may here be giving the Gothic leader a prominence he would only attain much later. In addition, the inclusion of accusations against Rufinus suggests that the second incident at least was clearly designed by Claudian to please his patron Stilicho. See Heather (1991) 184ff; Burns (1994) 102; Halsall (2007) 185, fn. 86 and Delaplace (2015) 105.
10 Zos. 4.50.1 – notes that Theodosius was "proud of his victory over Magnus Maximus" – suggesting this was the case. In addition, we have fragments of a column that Theodosius erected in the forum of Constantinople. At least part of this column seems to have depicted the defeat of Magnus Maximus, and provides evidence that Theodosius considered his campaign significant and wished to emphasise his success – see Speidel (1995).

11 It is thought that Galla had also given birth to a son named Gratian while Theodosius was in the west. The boy would be dead by 394 at the latest. See Rebenich (1985).
12 Croke (1976) 235–244 remains the most engaging treatment of the incident.
13 Ruf. *HE* 11.31. Similar equivocation is found in Aug. *Civ. Dei*. 5.26 "Valentinianus being soon after slain by secret assassination, or by some other plot or accident"; and in Soz. 7.22 "Some say that he was put to death by the eunuchs of the bedchamber, at the solicitation of Arbogast, a military chief, and of certain courtiers, who were displeased because the young prince had begun to walk in the footsteps of his father, concerning the government, and contrary to the opinions approved by them. Others assert, however, that Valentinian committed the fatal deed with his own hands, because he found himself impeded in attempting deeds which are not lawful in one of his years; and on this account he did not deem it worthwhile to live; for although an emperor, he was not allowed to do what he wished" (trans. Hartranft).
14 Orosius. 7.35.10. He is followed by Philostorgius 5.25.
15 Zos. 4.53–54 – has Arbogast himself murder Valentinian outside the walls of Vienne. Soc. 5.25 says that Valentinian was strangled in his sleep after Eugenius and Arbogast had corrupted the eunuchs of the bed chamber. *Epit. Caes.* 48 places blame on Eugenius who "destroyed Valentinianus at Vienna" in what can only be a distortion of sources that place blame on Arbogast. As for the later chronicles they offer very little in the way of additional information – see Croke (1976) 242–243.
16 Something overtly stated by Claudian (*de IV cos. Hon.* 75ff and more gently at *de III cos. Hon.* 63f) whose role as a mouthpiece for Stilicho and Honorius adds credence to the idea that this was a line being pushed by the dynasty.
17 Zos. 4.53.2–3. Philostorgius 11.1. In addition, Greg. Tur. *HF* 2.9 preserves Sulpicius Alexander's view that Valentinian II was completely dominated by Arbogast and "shut up in the palace at Vienne and reduced almost to the status of a private citizen".
18 Eunap. *fr.*58 = John of Antioch *fr.* 187. Greg Tur. *HF.* 2.9 notes that Arbogast put people loyal to him in positions of power throughout the western civil and military hierarchy and that "there was not one among those who were bound by their military oath of obedience to him who dared to obey the private orders let alone the public commands of the Emperor".
19 Ambrose was sent by the Senate to petition Valentinian to come to the aid of Italy. In his correspondence he strongly suggests that Valentinian wished to do so but could not (Amb. *de Ob. Val. Iun.* 2 and 22–27). He also claims (*de ob. Val. Iun.* 24) that the Praetorian Prefect Flavianus was extremely reticent to make the trip himself, something McLynn (1994) 335–336 believes was due to the fact that the Prefect knew it would anger Theodosius.
20 Zoz. 4.53.4.
21 Zos. 4.53.1 Eunap. *fr.*58.1 = Suda A 81.
22 We see echoes of this 'official line' that Arbogast was an untrustworthy barbarian in Claudian *de III cos. Hon.* 63–67 "Meanwhile the world forgot its loyalty: the thunder of civil war sounded afresh and discord shook the tottering earth. O ye guilty gods! O shame everlasting!—a barbarian exile had possessed himself of the cities of Italy and had entrusted the government of Rome to some low-born dependent" (trans. Platnauer).
23 Zos. 4.33.1 and 4.53.1.
24 Greg. Tur. *HF* 2.9.
25 McLynn (1994) 337, sums it up well when he says that Arbogast "waited helplessly for Theodosius to take control of the situation, but his patron had neither the means to assert himself constructively from Constantinople nor the imagination to

comprehend the west except as a potential threat to himself". Coinage: RIC IX Treveri 106 (a–c) and 107 (a–c) for examples. See also Pearce (1937) 1–27.

26 Liebeschuetz (2005) 358–359 places the address between 15 May and 22 August 392. McLynn (1994) 341, fn. 163 is more precise and believes it cannot have been given before the end of July. Arbogast had sent Valentinian II's body to Milan, where Ambrose had received permission from Theodosius to conduct a burial ceremony. It was at this ceremony that Ambrose delivered his address.

27 Amb. *de. Obit.* 27 "But with what pains, with what diligence would I have restored harmony and favour between you and your count! How would I have offered myself as a guarantor of your trustworthiness, and how (readily) would I have drawn onto myself the men who the count said make him afraid. At any rate if the (attitude of the) count had not been changed, I would have remained with you" (trans. Liebeschuetz).

28 Zos. 4.55.1.

29 Eunap. *fr.*58 =John of Antioch *fr.* 187

30 Here, and despite different circumstances, we should remember the example of Constantius II, who never erred on the side of caution removing both Gallus and Silvanus from independent roles lest they become threats to his rule. Perhaps Theodosius also remembered the role of Merobaudes in both the death of his father and the victory of Magnus Maximus?

31 Croke (1976) 243–244.

32 Soc. 5.25.1; Zos. 4.54.1, Philostorgius 11.2 and Eunap. *fr.*58 = Joh. Ant. *fr.*187

33 For Eugenius' connections to Arbogast's uncle Ricimer see Matthews (1975) 240.

34 Ruf. *HE* 11.31; Zos. 4.56.4 and Eunap. fr.60 = Joh. Ant. fr.187.

35 Bagnall (1987) 320–321. Theodosius however was accepted as a consul in the west along with Eugenius. On Abundantius see *PLRE* 1, Flavius Abandantius. Accession of Honorius: *Cons. Const.* a.393; Soc. 5.25; Soz. 7.24.1; Philostorgius 11.2; Claudian *de IV cos. Hon*. 169ff; Lib. *Ep.* 1100.

36 For Gildo's position during this civil war see Chapter 5 pages 75 & 79 in the current work.

37 Prominent examples in the anglophone tradition include Bloch (1963) 193–218; Williams and Friell (1994) 121f and Matthews (1975) 240ff.

38 Soz. 7.22; Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 2 (61).2. It is interesting to note that one of the embassies Eugenius sent to Theodosius contained Christian clerics – Ruf. *HE* 11.31. Philostorgius 11.2 claims that Eugenius was a pagan cannot be substantiated.

39 Paul. *V. Amb.* 31 and Orosius 7.12. Cameron (2010) 85ff casts strong doubt on Paulinus' account even noting that there is circumstantial evidence that Arbogast was a Christian. Orosius' reference is similarly problematic. His narrative was trying to explain why god had allowed a pagan like Arbogast to prosper under Theodosius. The only way he could do this was to suggest that Theodosius always trusted in god – and that Arbogast received god's good fortune when serving the emperor. When he abandoned Theodosius, he was abandoning god for pagan deities and his good fortune deservedly left him.

40 Doubt has even been cast on Flavianus' 'pagan' motivations. Salzman (2010) 199–204 believes he was driven mainly by political considerations including the status of his family and his declining importance to Theodosius.

41 Cameron (2010) 274ff.

42 Ruf. *HE* 11.33. Soz. 7.22 also mentions that Eugenius was "led by the predictions of individuals who professed to foresee the future, by the examination of the entrails and livers of animals and the course of the stars". (trans. Hartranft)

43 Cameron (2010) 100.

44 Cameron (2010) 90ff.

45 Although purporting to be from Spring 393 the letter was almost certainly edited prior to eventual publication to show Ambrose as a determined opponent of Eugenius – see Liebeschuetz (2005) 349–357.

46 Amb. *Ep. extra coll.* 10.2–6.
47 Amb. *Ep. extra coll*. 2.2. The letter was likely edited for publication and the fact that Ambrose did not make himself look more courageous by simply claiming that Eugenius reinstated funding for the pagan cults and that he bravely stood against it.
48 Paul. *V. Amb.* 26.
49 Cameron (2010) 80–83.
50 Zos. 4.59. On anachronistic claims of imperial support for the traditional cults see Cameron (2010) 90. For a detailed discussion of Theodosius' supposed trip to Rome in 394, and the anti-pagan measures he took see Paschoud (2003) 468–473, fn. 212–213. Notably, Maraval (2009) 280 claims that after his victory Theodosius annulled all the measures of restoration that Eugenius had made in regards to pagan religion. He offers no evidence for this claim, which is not surprising as the usurper had never undertaken such a restoration in the first place.
51 Zos. 4.56. See Heather (1991) 186–188.
52 Jordanes *Get.* 28. See also Orosius 7.35.19 who mentions that 10,000 Goths died on the first day of fighting. For the presence of Huns see Eunap. Fr.60= John of Antioch fr. 187.
53 Zos. 4.57 says that the three commanders were Saul, Bacurius and Gainas. Bacurius was an Armenian who had served in the Roman army since at least the 370s (*PLRE* 1, Bacurius); Saul was an Alan (*PLRE* 1, Saul); leaving Gainas as the only Goth. However, given he had entered the army as a common soldier and risen through the ranks, it is very likely that he also had served in the army prior to the agreement of 382 (*PLRE* 1, Gainas).
54 See Nicasie (1998) 88, fn. 32.
55 Zos. 4.58.1 erroneously says that Honorius came westwards with Theodosius. As Errington (2006) 41 notes this shows that his source Eunapius recognised "the dynastic importance of the occasion".
56 Zos. 4.57.3 – Galla lost the child as well.
57 Burns (1994) 104 suggests that he may have been collecting troops along the route.
58 Cameron (2010) 124 believes that the work of Rufinus was extremely influential in spreading this perspective.
59 Cameron (2010) 99 rightly notes that a number of Theodosius' leading commanders were pagan and others were very probably hated 'Arian' or non-orthodox Christians.
60 A range of divine portents and interventions can be found in our sources. Premonitions of Victory: Theod. *HE* 5.24. Intersession of god after Theodosius' prayers: Ruf. *HE* 11.33; Joh. Chrys. PG. 63.491; Soz. 7.24 (who claims that after Theodosius sought god's help a range of officers from Eugenius army sent to ambush the emperor decided to change sides); Soc. 5.25 – claims that the prayers offered by Theodosius after the defeat of his barbarian auxiliaries gave his troops, led by Bacurius, new heart to break through the enemy. Of course we should have no doubt that the emperor may have prayed before, or during battle – such behaviour would not be inconsistent with his character – or the actions of past emperors. Divine Wind: Ruf. *HE* 11.33; Theod. *HE* 5.24.; Aug. *de fide et operibus* 26.; Claudian *de III cos. Hon.* 94–95 (who interestingly gives the wind a pagan twist); Amb. *Psalm* 36.15. Soz. 7.24 also mentions the wind but does not give it any divine inferences. For an overview of the 'wind' in different accounts see Cameron (2010) 116 ff. Zos. 4.58.3 mentions a solar eclipse during the battle but does not specifically credit it to divine interference.
61 These claims are found in Aug. *Civ. Dei*. 5.26; Theod. *HE* 5.24. Such claims are significant as the *signa militaria* were powerful political statements used by the emperor to inspire loyalty in his troops and symbolise his own legitimacy. Like many other claims about the religious nature of the battle these are problematic and need to be systematically addressed. First, the supposed symbols used by

Eugenius and Arbogast differ depending on the account. Augustine says that Eugenius had set up large statues of Jupiter consecrated against Theodosius and designed to give resolve to his own troops. Theodoret however claims that the army of Eugenius and Arbogast were led by standards bearing the image of Hercules. Courcelle (1969), 123 followed by Woods (1995) 65, have argued that both reports are mangled versions from a common source. This would be odd given none of our other sources, including those dating from close to the battle itself, have any reference to such images. I would suggest then that such a source does not exist. Thus we are dealing with two separate claims here – and accordingly solutions have been presented for both. Woods (1995) 63ff argues that the two sources either mistakenly or misleadingly take a reference to the standards of a single unit – the *ioviani et herculiani* – and grossly overstating their role and significance on the battlefield. This of course is possible, as the *ioviani et herculiani seniores* were almost certainly part of Eugenius' army. However, we have no clear way of knowing whether the *signa militaria* of these units still matched the nomenclature of the units. What's more, their eastern counterparts the *ioviani et herculiani iunores* almost certainly fought on the side of Theodosius. Instead it is more likely that "Hercules leading Eugenius's army is simply an imaginary counterpoise to the Constantinian labarum that led the armies of Christian emperors." As for the statues of Jupiter found in Augustine's text it is possible that they simply record existence of a local shrine to Jupiter on or near the battlefield – Cameron (2010) 106.

62 See Paschoud (2003) 474ff for the most comprehensive overview of the battle.

63 Orosius 7.35.19; Zos. 4.58.3 says that "the greater part of Theodosius' allies fell". Jordanes *Get.* 28 says that 20,000 Goths served against Eugenius. Soc. 5.25 talks of barbarians within Theodosius army perishing. It was during this fighting that Zosimus (4.58.3) places his solar eclipse.

64 See fn. 59 above.

65 Soz. 7.24 – claims it was in return for "honourable posts" in his army. He also mentions that the leader of these troops was one Arbitio.

66 See fn. 59 for references to the sudden wind. It should be noted that it is meteorologically possible for high powered winds to have affected the battle given it was fought in a high mountain valley – however such winds are usually accompanied by rain – see Paschoud (1997) 278.

67 Death of Eugenius: Theod. *HE* 5.24; Orosius 7.35.19. Soz. 7.22.4 and Soc. 5.25.16 say that Theodosius wished to spare his enemy's life but that the usurper was killed by the soldiers – this is unlikely. Head of Eugenius Paraded in Italy: Zos. 4.58; Eunap. *fr.* 60= John of Antioch *fr.*187.

68 This has been presented as an act of desperation because he believed that the gods had failed him. More likely he simply believed he would not be forgiven by Theodosius.

69 Amb. *ep. 2.1.; Ep. extra coll.* 3.4. Symm *Ep.* 4.19; 51 and 6.12. *Clementia* is a major theme in Ambrose's obituary speech for Theodosius – see Cameron (2010) 120. See Ridley (1982) 202, fn. 152 for the widespread evidence of Theodosius' *clementia*. Leppin (2015) 213 identifies a Christian tradition of amnesty for defeated enemies on the part of Roman emperors that he believes originated with Theodosius.

70 Zos. 4.58.6.

71 Orosius 7.35.19 specifically says that Arbogast and Eugenius were the only victims of the war, strongly implying that Theodosius did not punish anyone else. Other victims are likely but the list was evidently very small.

72 Aug. *Civ. Dei*. 5.26 and Prud. *Contra Symm*. 1.608–615. Cameron (2010) 121 is sceptical that this took place.

73 Zos. 4.59.1; Prud. *Contra Symm.* 1.530ff. See fn. 50 above on the fictitious nature of the 394 visit to Rome by Theodosius.
74 *CTh.* 15.14.9–12.
75 Soc. 5.26.1 specifically states that this was the reason Honorius was summoned. McEvoy (2013) 139 believes that Theodosius would have brought Honorius westwards in any case. Honorius was accompanied by Stilicho's wife Serena and Galla Placidia – Claudian *de VI cos. Hon*. 6.88ff and Paulinus *V. Amb* 32.1. The latter's presence is especially significant and suggests that Theodosius was making a direct effort to remind the west of his links to the dynasty of Valentinian 1.
76 Death of Theodosius: *Cons. Const*. a.395.1; Soc. 5.26.4; Theod. *HE* 5.25; Philostorgius 11.2; *Chron. Pasch*. a.394. Marcell. com. a.395.1 and Ruf. *HE* 11.34, who says that Theodosius ruled for 17 years.

Conclusion

This study has traced Theodosius' reign from his unlikely rise to power through to his sudden, and for many of his contemporaries devastating, death. At almost 16 years his reign was lengthy for its age, which in and of itself makes Theodosius one of the most significant emperors of the fourth century. However, the sheer length of his reign only partly accounts for his imposing legacy. It is the challenging circumstances in which he ruled, and the way in which he reacted to these challenges, that have ensured Theodosius' place as a pivotal figure in the course of imperial political history, as well as in the broader economic, social and religious history of the empire. It was not just the long lenses of history that anointed Theodosius as a dominant and perhaps even transformational emperor. When he suddenly fell ill and died, the significance of his loss was immediately felt. When Ambrose evoked "severe earthquakes and incessant rain . . . a darkness gloomy beyond experience" to describe the bleak mood just before Theodosius' death, he was not just engaging in his customary overblown rhetoric.[1] Even in the west, where Theodosius' hold on power had been patchy at best, one can easily understand the ominous dread that surrounded the death of such a long-ruling emperor. No one wanted more civil war, but all recognised that the political climate had suddenly become very uncertain.[2]

As we have seen, Theodosius' reign was dominated by his dynastic ambitions, which manifested themselves in a diverse range of his policies and decisions. It is only appropriate then that we look first at the success (or otherwise) of these efforts. Before his sudden death, Theodosius had for the second time found himself as the unchallenged ruler of an empire that still stretched from Northern Britain through to the deserts of Syria. In addition, he had two sons that had already being designated as his heirs. However, this strength was largely superficial. In the west, he again needed to placate the senior military and civil officials of the fallen usurper's regime as well as the army that had recently opposed him. His future plans were also uncertain. Neither of his sons could rule unaided and he was faced with the choice of ruling alone or appointing a surrogate to rule part of the empire for him, or on behalf of one of his sons. We can never be sure how Theodosius planned to deal with this problem and given the rapid onset of his sickness and death he

may not have reached a conclusion. It is ironic for an emperor as careful as Theodosius that the dynastic plan he ended up implementing may have been more influenced by his sudden decline than by any of the carefully considered actions he took when still alive.

The impact of Theodosius' death was felt differently in the east and the west, with the latter left in a far more precarious situation. Theodosius had summoned Honorius westwards shortly after the Frigidus River, probably in direct response to his illness.[3] Also in the west was Stilicho, who as a trusted family member was to become Honorius' guardian.[4] In his funeral oration for Theodosius Ambrose maintains a studied silence regarding Stilicho and the role he would play in the new regime. This suggests that there was some confusion, even among those who had been close to Theodosius, regarding his wishes for the shape of the western regime after his death. However, even if he hadn't clearly communicated the exact role he wanted Stilicho to play, at the very least Theodosius saw the talented general as the stopgap solution he needed to maintain dynastic control over the west until Honorius came of age and could (presumably) rule unaided.

If this was his long-term solution, Theodosius must have believed that the familial links between Honorius and his Romano-Vandal protector would be enough to avoid a repeat of the disastrous experiment with Arbogast and ensure that Stilicho would continue to loyally serve his House. Such a gamble was sound although it is hard to see what other course of action was open to him. While it is tempting to doubt Stilicho's loyalty to his young ward, the fact remains that he vigorously defended Honorius' interests until his own premature death in 408. Stilicho knew that his interests and those of Honorius were closely linked, something Theodosius was surely counting on when he left him in charge of his son. When Honorius ordered Stilicho's death it was not necessarily because the young emperor believed he had been manipulated by his protector. Instead, it shows that Honorius had fallen under the thrall of other advisors like his *magister scrinii* Olympius. The entire episode reinforces just how vulnerable and easily influenced Honorius remained, even as an adult.[5] Despite ruling for another 15 years, Honorius would never manage to emerge as an effective and independent emperor and remained easily led by those around him. But unfortunately, unlike the years during which he enjoyed the strengthening hand of Stilicho, later advisors often had agendas inimical to his interests.

As for the east, Theodosius had left his elder son Arcadius in Constantinople when he marched against Eugenius. Although somewhat older than Honorius, and an Augustus since 383, Arcadius had not yet ruled in any autonomous capacity. He was 18 years old when Theodosius died but was unable to seize the mantle of independent rule in the face of his appointed guardian, the Praetorian Prefect Rufinus, who would effectively become the real power in the east. In fact, up until his death in 408 Arcadius, like his younger brother, would never actively run the empire in the same way as the adult emperors that came before him. Instead, he remained under the thrall of a succession of powerful advisors, including upon the death of Rufinus the eunuch Eutropius, his wife Aelia Eudoxia and finally Flavius Anthemius.

Even as adults, Honorius and Arcadius remained to all intents and purposes 'child emperors'. Their inability to exercise any real independence after their father's death is symbolic of a deep malaise in Theodosius' dynastic planning. Although raised to rule from birth, both sons were never actually trained to rule. Their sheltered upbringing contrasts strongly with that of the sons of Constantine 1, all of whom were able to immediately establish themselves as independent rulers after their father's death. Constantine ensured his sons received military training to prepare them for their roles as *imperatores* and his elder sons had the chance to actively campaign. Constans was younger than Arcadius when he took power in 337, his two brothers barely older, yet all three were able seize the mantle of power in a relatively independent fashion, with the 20-year-old Constantius II going on to rule for decades.[6] Later, even Gratian, who was made Augustus at the tender age of eight undertook a military traineeship under his father that prepared him for power. Arcadius and Honorius however never undertook any similar preparations and instead followed in the trajectory of Valentinian II, who was cloistered away by Theodosius to ensure the future of his own sons. Ironically, in failing to prepare his sons for military leadership, he unknowingly sabotaged their own ability to rule independently. While Honorius' young age precluded him from undertaking a meaningful military role the same cannot be said for Arcadius. If Theodosius had allowed his eldest son to undertake a military apprenticeship, particularly as part of his own western campaigns, he may have subsequently been able to break free of his advisors, project a more independent image to his subjects and establish a personal control over his most important stakeholder: the army. In his diatribe against Gildo, Claudian unwittingly reveals just how weak a position Arcadius and Honorius were left in after their father died. In an invented exchange between Theodosius and Arcadius, he has the dead emperor admit:

> When I was raised to heaven, disorder—I admit it—and tumult did I leave behind me. The army was still drawing the forbidden sword in that Alpine war, and conquerors and conquered gave alternate cause for dissension. Scarce could this madness have been calmed by my vigilance, much less a boy's rule. [7]
>
> (trans. Plautnauer)

Ambrose also recognised the danger and in his funerary oration for Theodosius vainly argued that Honorius' youth did not matter because his real strength lay in the loyalty of his soldiers. Unfortunately, if the soldiers had any loyalties (and even these were unstable) they were to Theodosius not necessarily to his son.[8]

Of course, we should not judge the success of Theodosius' dynastic plans solely on the failure of his sons to rule in the same independent fashion as their father. Whatever Theodosius' failings in preparing his sons to rule, and the consequences of his early death, it is undeniable that his dynastic legacy

was significant. Theodosius' family would dominate imperial politics in the fifth century, ruling in the west until 455 and in the east until 450.[9] Of course, in the west this would include long periods in which Theodosian emperors such as Honorius and Valentinian III ruled in name only, holding little practical power themselves due to their remoteness from the army and a series of strong surrogate military leaders. In the east, which was more territorially stable, the same problems existed but were less pronounced with Theodosius II enjoying a relatively independent, stable and long-lasting reign. On longevity alone then, Theodosius' tireless efforts to create a familial dynasty must be judged as successful. His achievement is even more remarkable given the haphazard origins of his own reign and his subsequent survival in the face of some determined and very able opponents.

An empire reshaped?

Theodosius' legacy goes far beyond his successful establishment of an imperial dynasty. The policies he pursued and the choices he made while in power would leave their mark on the empire and many of its institutions in a myriad of ways. One of the most prominent of these was his approach towards dealing with the empire's barbarian neighbours. When Theodosius became emperor he faced an immediate emergency. For the first time since the third century crisis, Rome was unable to ensure the territorial integrity of its empire on its own terms. Despite reigning for almost 16 years, Theodosius was never able to completely return the empire to its pre-Adrianople state. In the short-term he delivered a superficially impressive solution in the form of an agreement that offered immediate peace, new recruits for his shattered army and perhaps most importantly political justification for his claim to power. However, Theodosius made the agreement from a position of weakness and instead of using his long reign to redress the power balance he instead empowered the barbarian interlopers who now became an ever more necessary military crutch for the emperor and whose leaders gained more and more bargaining power as time went by. While Theodosius lived this was not completely problematic. He was a formidable military leader who worked assiduously to ensure good relationships with Gothic leaders and their followers, and in doing so reaped the rewards of their faithful military service. However, after his death, and under his much weaker sons, Gothic troops serving in the army became increasingly aware of the underlining weaknesses that led Rome to make the agreement in the first place. Tribal leaders such as Alaric took the opportunity afforded by Theodosius' death to flex their muscles and demand additional land and roles of power within the empire. Without the towering presence of Theodosius, Gothic leaders played the eastern and western courts against each other, realising that they could transition from being from guests begrudgingly settled within the empire to being masters of their own destiny.

The power vacuum that occurred after Theodosius' death gave oxygen to the unsatisfactory 'fix' that Theodosius had engineered way back in 382 and

which he temporarily controlled but never really rectified. While the eventual disintegration of the empire in the west was the product of many different factors it is undeniable that Theodosius' failure to decisively defeat the Gothic invaders after Adrianople and instead enter into a strategy of politic containment would after his death have serious and unforeseen consequences for the territorial integrity of the empire. In short, the future had been mortgaged to pay for the present. Perhaps if Theodosius had lived another decade, he could have safely mitigated the risks created by his agreement but his sudden death simply ensured that the festering wound he had created would finally explode.

Theodosius' impact was also keenly felt in the currents of religious change that continued to sweep over the empire after his death. The calculated risk he took to impose doctrinal homogeneity as a way of augmenting his own legitimacy in the east would prove instrumental in the ongoing development of the church. Doctrinal disputes of course continued unabated, but divergent views that had in the past received imperial sponsorship and caused great turmoil, were now forever consigned (at the very least) to minority status and persecuted as heresy.

Theodosius also accelerated the process by which church and state became ever more intertwined. By interfering so heavily in church appointments and doctrine for his own political ends, he brought the church hierarchy ever closer to the workings of the imperial government. One prominent by-product of this process was that ambitious church leaders found themselves playing new roles in the secular world. Under Theodosius it became increasingly common for bishops to become community advocates or even participate in, or seek to influence, the highest levels of imperial decision making. Accordingly, Theodosius clearly deserves the transformative mantle given to him by many fifth century historians of the Church even if they have mistaken political calculation for great personal piety as his main motivating factor. In the wake of Theodosius' reign, the church would become more powerful and influential than at any time in its past history.

As well as being hailed as an emperor who was instrumental in developing a doctrinally unified church, Theodosius was also feted as someone who had aggressively moved to rid the empire of pagan worship. As we have seen these views, found mainly in our Christian sources, are greatly exaggerated. Theodosius never implemented a long term 'anti-pagan' agenda and instead indulged in sporadic and targeted measures. Despite this, paganism in terms of political influence, monetary wealth and numbers of adherents, did continue to decline greatly during his reign. Theodosius' real contribution to this decline came via the sheer length of his reign during which he continued the policies of neglect employed by emperors before him (in particular robbing the cults of financial support) and which caused institutional paganism to wither on the vine in an increasingly rapid fashion. Theodosius was not the emperor that 'killed' or destroyed paganism as a serious and organised force in the empire, but he was the emperor who stood by and watched it continue to die.

This study began by looking at the character of Theodosius. His admirers feted his piety, kindness and diligence to his duties, often presenting him as a kind of imperial saint. His detractors however saw him as a wastrel, quick to anger and brutality and someone who sacrificed the future of the empire through weakness and ill-judged leadership. We have found that both these extremes are crude caricatures driven in even parts by ideology, misplaced nostalgia, and in many cases sheer vindictiveness or sycophancy. Instead, a more balanced examination of the evidence shows that Theodosius was in most respects the ultimate pragmatist. He was an emperor who had the innate ability to judge a situation and determine how its circumstances could best suit his immediate needs. At times he was capable of great daring and as his imposition of Nicene Christianity in the east and his lightning campaign against Magnus Maximus shows – this quality could pay handsome dividends. But he was also often reflective and prepared to bide his time. For example, the rapid advance that defeated the Spanish usurper only occurred after a lengthy and deliberate strategy of feigned acceptance to Magnus Maximus' rule, which allowed Theodosius the time he needed to recharge his military strength following the Gothic wars.

Theodosius was also an emperor who recognised his own weaknesses and manoeuvred cleverly to either conceal them or make them work to his advantage. The Goths could not be completely defeated so they were accommodated in a fashion that could be presented to the empire as a victory. Antioch's rebellion against his heavy taxation regime could not be seen to be tolerated but nor could he afford to devastate one of the largest cities of the east on the eve of a civil war. Accordingly, he handed down both punishments and pardons that enhanced his own reputation. Likewise, Theodosius no doubt considered pagan ritual as distasteful but knew he could not afford to launch wholescale persecutions. If leading pagan officials could be useful to his rule they would be subsumed into the regime. Disturbances between Christians and pagans would not be allowed to get out of hand, although here the rising currents of religious change and fervour meant his efforts were not wholly successful.

In the end, Theodosius was an emperor whose reign was largely defined by the ongoing hurdles he faced and his myopic determination to cement his family as the natural dynasty of rule. Outside of his tactical support for Nicene Christianity in the east he was largely reactive in nature, adept at introducing temporary fixes and relationships of convenience, some of which would go on to have long term negative consequences for the empire.

It is almost futile to try and offer an overarching judgement on Theodosius' legacy due to its multi-faceted and highly inconsistent nature. However, leaving the inherently radical contrasts of his reign aside, it is clear that Theodosius had a much deeper and lasting impact on the course of imperial history than many of his immediate predecessors and successors. In addition, his reign remains a watershed in the expression of imperial leadership and was the last period during which we can talk of a meaningful administrative unity

between east and west. In the end then, Theodosius was a transformational figure but like all emperors he was also buffeted by broader historical currents which he could never quite overcome.

Notes

1 Amb. *de ob. Theod*. 1.
2 *Epit. Caes.* 48.16 suggests that very late in his career he was at his most popular. "What is of rare virtue, he was doubtless better after his regal power increased with the years, and better by far after his victory in civil war" (trans. Banchich).
3 See Chapter 9, page 146, fn. 75.
4 Zos. 4.59.1. Stilicho also claimed to have been appointed guardian of Arcadius. However, apart from the work of his propagandist Claudian (*de III cos. Hon*. 142–152; *de IV cos. Hon.* 430ff; *in Ruf.* 2.5 and *de cos. Stil*. 2.53.) only Zos. 5.4.2–3 and 5.34.6 mentions such an appointment. While some have seen such an appointment as plausible – see Demougeot (1951) 99–102 – it is a hard claim to believe given Rufinus' role in the east and Arcadius' age. Also, it is not plausible that Theodosius would expect Stilicho to play the role of guardian for both his sons given the geographic distances involved.
5 Zos. 5.32.
6 Lib. *Or*. 59 and 44. Upon the death of Constantine, his sons were the following ages – Constantine II, 21; Constantius II, 20 and Constans, 17. The two eldest brothers had both been involved in some active campaigning before their father's death see *Epit. Caes.* 41.20 and Anon. Val. 35; Julian *Or.* 1.13b–14b and Amm. 18.9.1.
7 Claud. *de bello Gild.* I. 292–297.
8 Amb. *de ob. Theod*. 6. It could even be argued that the western troops were not even really loyal to Theodosius given the rawness of their recent defeat at the Frigidus River.
9 After Valentinian III's assassination there were emperors who could claim marriage links with the House of Theodosius including Petronius Magnus Maximus (married to Licinia Eudoxia, daughter of Theodosius II) and Olybrius (married to Placidia, a daughter of Valentinian III). After the death of Theodosius II Marcian, the husband of Theodosius II's sister Pulcheria, would rule until 457.

Appendix 1

Theodosius: the army, discipline, and loyalty

Theodosius was raised a soldier and as emperor he made a significant contribution to the evolving character of the Roman army, with significant decisions such as integrating large numbers of Gothic recruits into its ranks and restructuring the army in the wake of Magnus Maximus' defeat. But beyond these notable decisions, Theodosius also had to employ ongoing strategies to ensure a strong relationship with what was his most important political stakeholder. Here we look at the ways Theodosius worked to maintain the loyalty (*fides*) of the army and examine the question of whether Theodosius allowed military discipline (*disciplina militaris*) to dissolve during his reign.

Fides Militum

Like every emperor before him, Theodosius had to fulfil defined roles if he wished to maintain the loyalty of his troops.[1] Most prominent was the need to portray the image of a successful *imperator* (military leader). Theodosius was the last emperor to do this for a very long period. After his death a succession of young, and capital bound emperors in both the east and west relied on their senior commanders to campaign for them.[2] It is hard to tell exactly how actively involved Theodosius was in the campaigns during his reign. He did personally direct the confused fighting with Gothic interlopers that occurred in the years after his accession, although much of the actual campaigning was left to his generals. Theodosius also accompanied the armies that marched westwards to put down the usurpations of Magnus Maximus and Eugenius, and he was present at least one major set piece battle. Also, on his return from campaigning against Magnus Maximus he led a force against barbarians terrorizing Macedonia.[3] Given that even the hostile Zosimus was forced to admit that he was an "aggressive and skillful" commander, we can come to no other conclusion than that Theodosius was held in wide esteem by the army for his military abilities.[4]

Whatever his actual military record, Theodosius knew it was important to promote an image of himself as an active campaigner. In a speech delivered by Pacatus, we see how the emperor wished to be perceived – as both an active commander and fellow-soldier (*commilito*):

> No, you would be the first, or among the first, to meet all your military obligations – to stand in the front line, to keep watch according to the lot, to hammer in the stakes, to choose in advance a place to give battle, to go out to scout, to measure out the camp, to be the first to advance into battle and the last to retreat from it, to be a general in counsel and a soldier by example.[5]
>
> (trans. Nixon)

In earlier epochs the emperor would mint a dazzling array of coin types that spoke of his martial courage (*virtus*) and any number of individual victories he had earned for the empire. Theodosius however lived in a more difficult age. With actual victories hard to come by, he stuck to a small group of vague claims that showed him as the transcendent military figure of the empire. Some legends such as VICTORIA AUGUSTORUM showed that victory itself was owned by the emperor and his chosen colleagues while the likes of RESTITUTOR REIPUBLICAE, SALUS REIPUBLICAE and SECURITAS REIPUBLICAE presented Theodosius as the sole figure standing between the empire and oblivion. There were however periods of more intense and targeted messaging. For example, legends exulting *victoria* were particularly prevalent following Theodosius' victory over Magnus Maximus when the emperor was keen to signal his status as the sole source of military power and *victoria* in the empire.[6]

Strangely, and unlike past emperors, Theodosius did not seem interested in proclaiming his military prowess via imperial titulature. While his decision not to carry traditional imperatorial acclamations was understandable given their almost anachronistic nature, far more surprising was his choice to break with the practice of taking victory titles fashioned from the names of defeated enemies (*cognomina devictarum gentium*) such as *Persicus, Francicus* and *Alamannicus*. Themistius describes such titles as relics of a past age, and elsewhere notes that Theodosius held titles far more consequential titles than *Germanicus* and *Sarmaticus*. [7] We do not know why Theodosius abandoned these titles. It could be that they had simply become devalued through dubious overuse. Otherwise, the emperor may have been loath to advertise specific claims of victory against the barbarians he now heavily relied on to re-populate his own armies? He did however continue to carry generic titles such as VICTOR ET TRIUMPHATOR to signify his role in protecting the empire. [8]

Theodosius also continued to play the all-important role as sole provider of the army's range of rewards (*praemia militiae*), most prominently the provision of regular special payments (*donativa*) and supplies (*annona*). Indeed, as we have seen, the emperor was so concerned to maintain these payments that he introduced an oppressive taxation regime that led to significant disquiet in the east.[9] He also made sure to maintain the necessary rituals that bonded an emperor to his army, whether that be demanding his soldiers swore the military oath (*sacramentum*), naming military units after his house; and minting coinage that extolled the efforts of the army, most prominently 'the valour of the army' (VIRTUS E-XERCITI).[10]

All emperors relied heavily on their senior commanders to both manage military affairs and keep the army loyal to their cause. In many ways his senior commanders were even more important to Theodosius, who never had an adult co-emperor to shoulder the military load. Not surprisingly Theodosius was active in trying to ensure their continued loyalty. Aside from *donativa* and *annona* payments commiserate to their rank, senior officers could also expect to receive personalised gifts (*dona*), usually objects made from precious metals. He also made sure to offer them the opportunity to fill symbolically important positions, with no fewer than five of his senior generals honoured with consulships.[11]

This largesse of course reminds us of a more sinister truth that an emperor's senior commanders were in many ways the greatest potential threat to an emperor's rule. This concern explains why Theodosius moved to flatten the command structure of the eastern army around the time of his victory over Magnus Maximus. Zosimus describes the move with characteristic venom:

> Meanwhile, the emperor Theodosius, residing in Thessalonica, was easy of access to all who wished to see him. Having commenced his reign in luxury and indolence, he threw the magistracy into disorder, and increased the number of his military officers. There had previously been but one general or master of the horse, and one of the foot, but he now distributed those offices to more than five persons. Each of these was allowed the same stipend which either of the two had before enjoyed.[12]
>
> (trans. Ridley)

Here Theodosius removed the previous primacy of the Master of Infantry and Master of Cavalry to produce an equal structure of five generals, three responsible for defined regions and two responsible for the mobile forces usually found with the emperor. The timing of this action is instructive. Theodosius had just witnessed the rise of a powerful western general against Gratian and was about to spend a protracted stay in the west. He was clearly keen to ensure that none of his own eastern generals would be too powerful while he was away.

Theodosius' success in maintaining the loyalty of his generals in the east was not mirrored in the west, where he made the critical mistake of giving Arbogast complete control of the western armies. One wonders why Theodosius had simply not replicated the same structure in the west as he had in the east. The answer probably lies in the fact that his dynastic plans required a powerful regent in the west to neuter the authority of Valentinian II. What's more, when the revolt of Arbogast came it was not planned, but was the product of circumstance, suspicion and poor communication.

As to why the western army was willing to follow Arbogast into rebellion, this can be explained by their ongoing resentment at the defeat of Magnus Maximus and the relatively short period many units spent in Theodosius' service before the fresh usurpation. That said, we cannot discount the idea that

the units left in the west were more prepared to follow a commander who was geographically present and who they had served under first-hand.[13] Whatever the case, this episode again reinforces the importance of the emperor as *imperator* in the maintenance of military loyalty and foretells the problems that would face the decidedly unmilitary emperors of the fifth century.

Disciplina militaris

A final issue to consider in Theodosius' management of the army is whether he was willing to relax military discipline (*disciplina militaris*) to engender support for his rule.

Declining military discipline is a common theme in our sources, especially those covering the later imperial period. By the time Theodosius came to power, emperors as far back as Septimus Severus had been blamed for allowing standards to drop which impacted on the army's fighting ability.[14] Theodosius himself comes in for some of the most severe criticism as an emperor who was particularly lax in maintaining military discipline. According to Zosimus, one of the most egregious innovations introduced by Theodosius was allowing barbarians who wished to desert their tribes to enrol in the army. In one example, from 380, these ill-disciplined recruits came into conflict with Egyptian troops moving to the front after they attempted to steal goods from a marketplace in the city of Philadelphia, Lydia.[15] Zosimus is just as scathing about the state of discipline in the emperor's forces in Macedonia, who at that time were battling to contain the significant barbarian incursion over the Danube.

> When the Egyptians reached Macedonia, and joined the legions there, there was no discipline among the soldiers; no distinction was made between Roman and barbarian, with everyone living together indiscriminately, and no record kept of those enrolled in the army. And the deserters, even those already enlisted in the legions, were allowed to return home, and send others in their place, and then to serve again under the Romans whenever they wanted.[16]
>
> (trans. Ridley)

Further to the east, Libanius dismisses the quality of the Roman army that garrisoned cities in the region:

> Their glory is to get drunk, fetch up their food and start off at once on another round of eating and selling: it is a disgrace for them to practice or to school themselves with proper exercises on the training field. As a result, all the enemy needs to do in action is to set up a yell, and they are off and away, and any who stays, stays but to be beaten: their souls are fearful, their bodies little better than shadows.[17]
>
> (trans. Norman)

Finally, the military writer Vegetius adds to this critique with his criticisms of the training practices of the army:

> But upon the intervention of neglect and idleness field exercises ceased, and arms which soldiers rarely donned began to be thought heavy. So they petitioned the emperor that they should hand in first the cataphracts, then helmets. Thus with their chests and heads unprotected our soldiers have often been destroyed in engagements against the Goths through the multitude of their archers.[18]
>
> (trans. Milner)

Despite these criticisms, there is no real indication that Theodosius oversaw a marked downturn in military discipline. Claims of ill-discipline and corruption are common in our sources, with emperors as diverse as Constantine and Valens accused of allowing standards to slip. Additionally, when we consider the antiquarian bent of Vegetius work and Zosimus' almost uniformly hostile view of Theodosius, we must reconsider the validity of their claims. What's more, the episodes described by Zosimus refer to the chaotic years at the beginning of Theodosius' reign, where the new emperor was attempting to hold together a rapidly crumbling frontier with an army created almost wholly from scratch. Although Themistius claims that "Already you make even farmers a terror to the barbarian . . .", Theodosius could only do so much with a rapidly recruited army of untrained farmers.[19] This would change in later years when Theodosius was able to reinstate ongoing training regimes for his new army.

The most prevalent of all these claims is that Theodosius' increased use of barbarian troops severely damaged discipline in the army. There is however no reliable evidence for such a trend We must remember that Zosimus, our main source for these accusations, was hardly a neutral observer and instead was uniformly hostile to Theodosius' use of barbarians to replenish the ranks of the army, which he blamed for the problems that emerged in the fifth century. It is also important to note that all the incidents highlighted by Zosimus occurred in the first few years of Theodosius' reign. Later, barbarian troops served the emperor with great bravery in two civil wars, and even against their own kinsmen attempting to enter the empire. Most noticeable was their role during the Battle of the Frigidus River where thousands of barbarian troops perished in a furious frontal assault on the strong positions of Eugenius' forces. If this episode is any indication, the barbarian troops had adopted Roman standards of discipline without any great trouble.[20]

Of course, a measure of ill-discipline and corruption did exist within Theodosius' army – but in this, his army was no different to Roman armies of the past. While desertion continued to be a major issue, corruption was also a disruptive force. Libanius offers first hand evidence of soldiers running 'protection rackets' against hapless citizens in the east.[21] Rank and file troops were also at the prey of rapacious officers. Libanius further describes ordinary soldiers, and even cavalry horses, being left to starve saying that officers "feather their own nests and make the lives of their men a misery".[22]

Theodosius did not ignore these problems and worked diligently to combat them. Jordanes specifically says that it was Theodosius who returned discipline to the eastern army after being appointed by Gratian.[23] This evidence is confirmed by Theodosius' vigorous attempts to stop desertion among his ranks. That this effort was ongoing until at least 391, when new laws against desertion appeared, shows that he was persistent if not altogether successful.[24] Additionally, Theodosius legislated against corruption, specifically by trying to stop soldiers demanding wood, oil and mattresses from the homes in which they were billeted. He also attempted to protect communities by forbidding soldiers to wander through private landholdings. Theodosius even went as far as to allow citizens to defend themselves with force against any soldier who sought to rob them. These are hardly the actions of an emperor who deliberately let the army do as it pleased in order to curry their favour.[25] In many ways Theodosius followed the path set by his father who, Ammianus argues, was an iron disciplinarian in the mould of Roman generals of old.[26] If there is any truth in this portrayal, it is far more likely that Theodosius would have emulated the man who helped shape his military career rather than going against type and proving himself to be a weak disciplinarian.

In the end, it is Theodosius' incredible success as a commander that offers the best evidence that the army he led was in no way inferior to previous incarnations of the fourth century. His achievements are made all the more impressive by the fact that he was faced with trying to rebuild an institution that had suffered one of the worst defeats in Roman military history, with his failure to comprehensively defeat the Goths emblematic of the weakened military machine he had inherited. However, the army led by Theodosius did manage to successfully maintain the territorial integrity of the empire as well as win two major civil wars, a remarkable feat given its state after Adrianople.

Like all emperors before him, Theodosius faced significant challenges in attempting to maintain military loyalty. Overall, given the length of his reign, and the unique challenges he faced at every stage of his rule, he must be judged as having been generally effective in doing this. He employed a suite of largely traditional measures designed to strengthen his relationship with the troops and was viewed by them as a worthwhile commander. Additionally, his efforts to gain favour with the troops did not include abandoning standards of discipline. His record, both against external enemies and internal competitors, was impressive and significantly contributed to the length of his reign. It is also noticeable that Theodosius was the last emperor who actively attempted to relate to his army as their direct and active commander. While his sons would employ a number of the same tried and tested measures as their father did to maintain the army's loyalty to their cause, their relationship with the troops was intrinsically different because they were unable to claim the mantle of being active commanders. Subsequently this left them in a far weaker political position.

Notes

1 Hebblewhite (2017) remains the only complete treatment of the subject for the late antique period.
2 On the 'generalissimos' of the fifth century see O'Flynn (1983). The only possible exception to this pattern of non-campaigning emperors was Majorian. (457–461) In the east, emperors only began to take the field again in the sixth century.
3 On the Gothic wars see Chapter 2. The campaign against Magnus Maximus is covered in Chapter 6, and that against Eugenius and Arbogast in Chapter 9. On the action in Macedonia see Chapter 9, p 129.
4 Zos. 4.24.4. However, Zosimus also regularly gave credit for military successes during the reign not to Theodosius himself, but to his generals – Zos. 4.27.1 and 4.49.3.
5 *Pan. Lat*. 2 (12).10.3–4.
6 This was particularly important in the west where Magnus Maximus had been exalted by the army. VICTOR-IA AUGG – *RIC* IX: Treveri, n. 90 (a–c); n. 97 (a–c) and n. 98 (a–c); VICTORIA AUGUSTORUM– *RIC* IX: Arelate, n. 39 (a–b); VICTOR-IA AUGGG – *RIC* IX, Lugdunum: 30 (a–e). Rarer is coinage exulting the *virtus* of the emperor – VIRTUS-AUGGG – *RIX* IX, Thessalonica n. 61 (a–c).
7 For the use of titulature to proclaim military prowess and success see Hebblewhite (2017) 50–60.
8 VICTOR ET TRIUMPHATOR – *ILS* 785.
9 On *praemia militiae* see Hebblewhite (2017) 71–119. Zos. 4.27.3 makes the unlikely claim that at one point under Theodosius the soldiers did not receive their pay.
10 Sacramentum: Hebblewhite (2016) 128–135; Bonding Rituals: Hebblewhite (2017) 140–179; VIRTUS E-XERCITI – *RIC* IX: Heraclea n. 24 (a–c); Constantinople n. 83 a–d.
11 Consulships: Lee (2015) 111. Dona: Beyeler (2011) catalogues a wide range of examples from the fourth century including Theodosian examples (316ff).
12 Zos. 4.27.1–2. Zosimus mistakenly places the move earlier in Theodosius' reign. See Hoffmann (1969) 387–396 for a detailed study of the command structure of the later part of the fourth century.
13 This had happened on a number of occasions previously. See Hebblewhite (2017) 8–27.
14 Hebblewhite (2017) 128ff including references.
15 Zos. 4.30.
16 Zos. 4.31.
17 Lib. *Or*. 2.38. Libanius then goes on (39) to criticise soldiers being married and the effect it has on military efficiency.
18 Veg. *Epit*. 1.20. If we reasonably assume a late fourth century date for Vegetius' work, then it is clear that the author is making a comment on the Roman army at the time of Adrianople and the years that followed: that is the reign of Theodosius.
19 Them. *Or*. 14.181b.
20 As noted by Liebeschuetz (1991) 22 "there is little evidence for disloyalty motivated by tribal solidarity".
21 Lib. *Or*. 47 – including an extended diatribe about falling military standards of discipline (25–34).
22 Lib. *Or*. 2.37.
23 Jordanes *Get*. 27 "Now in the place of Valens, his uncle, the Emperor Gratian established Theodosius the Spaniard in the Eastern Empire. Military discipline was soon restored to a high level, and the Goth, perceiving that the cowardice and sloth of former princes was ended, became afraid" (trans. Mierow).
24 *CTh*. 7.18.8.
25 *CTh*. 7.1.12, 7.9.3 and 9.14.2.
26 Amm. 29.5.22; 29.5.31; 29.5.49.

Appendix 2
Constantinople: the jewel in the crown

When Theodosius was proclaimed emperor in 379 it was far from certain that he would choose to make Constantinople his capital city. The last emperor to spend significant periods of time in the city was Constantine, who had bequeathed his name to the existing insignificant settlement and attempted to establish it as a major imperial centre.[1] His successors on the other hand had treated the city "more as a transit camp", with Valens in particular actively avoiding it due to its role in the ill-fated rebellion of Procopius.[2]

After his accession, Theodosius did not set up his new court in Constantinople but instead went to Thessalonica. However, this city was never going to be his permanent capital and was instead driven by the pressing military needs of the post-Adrianople landscape. Theodosius had no choice but to remain within the immediate conflict zone and personally lead efforts to drive the Gothic invaders from the empire. Thessalonica offered a defensible and geographically suitable location from which he could try to do this. At the time though, there was concern that Theodosius had indeed chosen the city as a permanent base. In 379 a delegation from the Senate of Constantinople visited Theodosius in Thessalonica, where Themistius delivered a speech before the emperor in which he emphasised that Constantinople was anxiously awaiting him ("the Fair City . . . preparing the crown of riches for that day on which she shall place it on his brow when he returns in glory"). He reminded the emperor that Constantinople was "the city which rules cities" and that it was "anxious to receive her protector as soon as possible and meet him before the rest of the East".[3] (trans. Heather & Moncur) The citizens of Constantinople needn't have worried. Theodosius was to enter their city by November 380 and would spend over half his reign there, leaving only to confront western usurpers.[4]

For Theodosius Constantinople was more than a mere residence. It was the stable and symbolic heart of his regime, a belief he advertised on his coinage whose reverse types often included an image of the city.[5] While he only came to Constantinople nearly two years after his accession, he understood how important it would be to his regime from very early in his reign. While still at Thessalonica, Theodosius began appointing new members of the Constantinopolitan Senate showing that he wished the city to retain its formal trappings as a 'New Rome'.[6] He also issued the extremely significant *cunctos*

populos edict, which as we have seen was aimed squarely at ensuring his control over the religious landscape of Constantinople.[7] In short, even though he was yet to enter the city, he was already working towards the day when he would make it the jewel in his new crown.

It has been argued that Theodosius' strong focus on Constantinople and his "civic and urban development" of the city, was designed to substitute for his inability to deliver the military successes he needed to prove his legitimacy.[8] While it is true that Theodosius was in no position to immediately continue undertaking full-scale campaigns following the conclusion of the Gothic wars, the timing of his move to Constantinople, and his subsequent long residence in the city, goes beyond military impotence. As a newcomer to the east, Theodosius was determined to remake Constantinople as emblematic of his right to rule and to emphasise that he had left his western roots behind. Theodosius clearly understood the symbolic potency of the city to his inchoate regime and moved quickly to capitalise on it. Only two months after Theodosius himself entered the city with great fanfare, Athanaric, one of Rome's most implacable Gothic foes, came to the city to conclude a peace treaty with the empire. Upon entering the city, Athanaric was supposed to have said "I have seen what I have often heard of though I did not believe it."[9] Here Theodosius used the impressive and overwhelming urban landscape of the city to display his dominance over his foe, reminding him that Constantinople, and by extension the empire, could never be taken.

Theodosius would also go on to use Constantinople to proclaim his unquestioned legitimacy to his new subjects. Once ensconced in the city, he moved quickly to stamp his authority on both its institutions and its physical landscape.[10] Prior to Theodosius there had not been a constant imperial presence in Constantinople and accordingly the city's role in imperial ritual and ceremony had been sporadic at best. Theodosius symbolically signalled that this would change by abandoning the long-standing ritual whereby Constantine's statue located in the hippodrome was annually honoured on the anniversary of the city's foundation (11 May). Constantine may have founded the city, but Theodosius was now making it into a true imperial capital by giving it a role in a full calendar of events marking the emperor's legitimacy and power.[11] The most significant of all these were the proclamations of Arcadius and Honorius as *Augusti*. The ceremonies for both took place in an outlying area of the city called the Hebdemon and represent a continuation of one of the few ceremonial occasions of Valens' reign that actually took place in Constantinople. By having his sons proclaimed at the same place as Valens, and within the city he had chosen as his capital, Theodosius was erasing his own status as a western outsider. His dynasty was now of the east with its power legitimised in the east.[12]

Important anniversaries of the regime were now intrinsically linked to Constantinople itself. First among these was the annual celebration of the *dies imperii* – the date on which the emperor assumed power. This event was politically crucial as it served as an annual reaffirmation of an emperor's right to rule. Theodosius celebrated numerous *dies imperii* while resident in Constantinople, including his especially significant *quinquennial* and *decennial* milestones. He

shared his *dies imperii* with Arcadius and the city came alive with games and other events to emphasise not only the present of the regime in Theodosius, but its future in his son.[13] Similarly important were the yearly celebrations of the emperor's birthday (*dies natalis*). Theodosius recognised the political importance of these anniversaries and decreed that they must be "held in equal reverence" to Christian holy days. Although public spectacles and games were generally banned on Sundays, the emperor made sure this did not apply when his anniversaries fell on that day. Nothing would be allowed to interfere in Theodosius' use of the city and its inhabitants as elements in his propaganda.[14]

Other events that formed part of the city's regular calendar of imperial adulation included imperial consulships; funerals (during his reign Theodosius lost two wives and three infant children); weddings (such as that between Theodosius' niece Serena and Stilicho) and military victories. The latter were particularly important to Theodosius as he came to power promising to return military success to the empire after Adrianople. The ceremonial aspects of such celebrations can be glimpsed in the entry of Athanaric into Constantinople in 381 where the emperor even rode out to meet him.[15] Other victory announcements were no doubt accompanied by appropriate celebrations such as games. On his return to Constantinople in 391, Theodosius even made sure to publicly celebrate his victory over another Roman – Magnus Maximus, an event for which the spectacular Golden Gate was most likely constructed, emphasising the triumphal nature of the emperor's return and forming a permanent mark of his success.[16]

A law from 383 shows just how important Constantinople and its inhabitants were to Theodosius' efforts to formally express and buttress imperial milestones and achievements. In it he explicitly forbids any charges or levies being placed on the citizens of the city for celebrations connected to announcements of imperial success or other good news. Specifically mentioned are consulships, peace treaties and victory announcements.[17]

By spending large amounts of time in Constantinople and using the city as the ceremonial backdrop for important imperial events and announcements, Theodosius made the city into a working capital and the ideological heart of his regime. But this was not enough for the emperor. He also cleverly sought to use Constantinople to emphasise the idea that he and his sons were the legitimate heirs of past emperors by consolidating their physical remains within the city. While the remains of both Constantine and Constantius II already lay within the city walls, Theodosius sought out the remains of Julian and his wife Helena for reburial in Constantinople.[18] He also formally reinterred the remains of both Jovian and Valentinian. Finally, while Theodosius was unwilling to force Ambrose to hand over Gratian's ashes, he was able to gain the remains of his wife (and the daughter of Constantius II) Constantina.[19] By creating a single repository for imperial remains located at the heart of the city, Theodosius made himself the keeper of past imperial legacies and by implication the determiner of imperial power in the future.

Alongside activities designed to promote Constantinople as the base of secular power in the empire, Theodosius also worked to grow the city's status

within the Christian church. We have already seen that Theodosius used the imposition of Nicene Christianity to establish his regime in the east and that Constantinople was central to this program. He rid the City of competing doctrines; installed a hand-picked ally as bishop and used the Council of Constantinople to make his city equally prominent with Rome. He also made Constantinople a centre for holy relics by collecting the remains of martyrs and saints, including the (supposed) head of John the Baptist, which was deposited at a church in the politically significant Hebdemon.[20] Croke has argued that in bringing these relics to Constantinople, Theodosius not only developed an important accompanying ceremonial (an *adventus* with spiritual significance) but that he was overseeing "the replacement of the traditional military ideology with a sanctified one".[21] Such a claim is overstated as Theodosius maintained an aggressive military ideology throughout his reign. However, his use of relics once again reinforces the multifaceted efforts undertaken by Theodosius to use Constantinople as the centrepiece of his claim to legitimacy.[22]

Theodosius did more than use the existing urban landscape as a backdrop for imperial events and ceremonies. He also actively tried to re-shape it via a range of building projects. Even projects that were more practical than anything else, such as the extension of the Aqueduct of Valens, and the construction of the new Harbour of Mamara and its associated grain stores (*Horrea Theodosiaca*) fed into Theodosius' need to ensure that his chosen city had the infrastructure necessary to support its new role as the centre of the Roman world.[23] Less essential in urban planning terms, but highly effective in terms of gaining favour with the city's inhabitants, was the construction of a new hippodrome and baths, the latter named after Arcadius.[24] Pandering to the urban mob was nothing new for a Roman emperor but Theodosius recognised that by placing the city at the centre of his expression of legitimacy made him more at the mercy of its teeming masses than his immediate predecessors had ever been.

Other building projects undertaken by Theodosius explicitly attempted to impose an ideological agenda on the urban landscape of the city. New palaces, for Aelia Flaccilla, Galla and then Arcadius emphasised that the regime was here to stay, while a number of new churches spoke to the emperor's dominance over what had been a city fractured by doctrinal differences. Theodosius also made a number of grand statements within what can be termed the city's 'public sphere'. The most expansive of these was the so called the *Forum Theodosii*, whose construction was probably started not long after the emperor reached the city in 380. It was situated at the centre of the city, contained numerous grand structures and was adorned with statues of the imperial family.[25] The style of the forum has been likened to that of the Forum of Trajan in Rome, and was yet another attempt by the emperor to link himself with the success and majesty of his revered Spanish predecessor. A similar ideological statement was a victory column constructed just north of the forum (again in the spiral style of Trajan's Column in Rome) and which most probably told the story of the emperor's 'victory' over the Goths.[26] Of

course, the idea that Theodosius' 'victory' was anywhere near as comprehensive as that achieved by Trajan achieved against the Dacians and advertised on his column is far-fetched. However, that Theodosius would use the urban landscape of Constantinople to try and push what was at best a bold claim, and at worst a false narrative, demonstrates just how critical the city had become in the regime's ideological expression.[27]

A similar grand ideological message can be found on the base of the Theodosian Obelisk, which is one of the city's only surviving structures from the reign of Theodosius. The obelisk itself was originally erected by Pharaoh Thutmose III and both Constantius II and Julian had attempted to have it transported to Constantinople from Egypt. Eventually, Theodosius would successfully erect the Obelisk in the centre of the Hippodrome in 390.[28] Its base was crafted from marble and contained a sculpted image on each of the four sides and inscriptions (one in Latin and one in Greek) on its eastern and western faces that confirm it was erected as a triumphal monument.[29] On the north-west side, we see a scene of submission, with the emperor surrounded by his family receiving the surrender of a host of figures, most likely meant to be Germanic barbarians. On the south-east face there is a scene of the emperor presiding over celebrations perhaps for one of his military victories. On the north-east and south-west faces the emperor sits in state, presiding over an event in the Hippodrome surrounded by his children, courtiers and guards (see Figures A2.1 and A2.2).[30]

While there remains debate regarding the minutiae of the scenes, in particular the exact identity of the surrounding figures, their ideological intent is

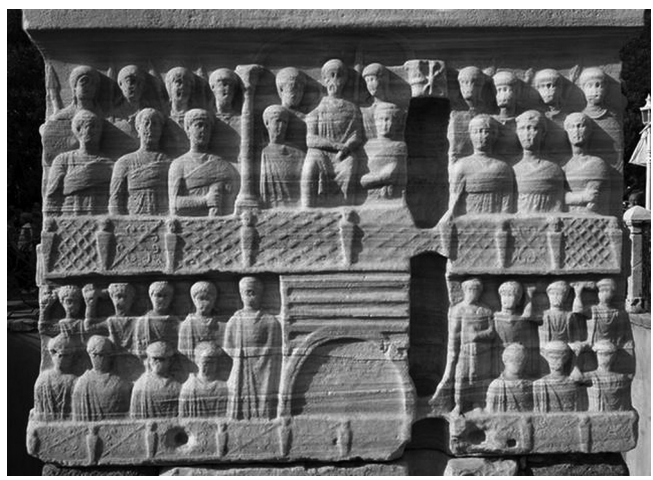

Figure A2.1 NORTH-EAST FACE OF THE BASE OF THE THEODOSIAN OBELISK (Theodosius sits in state, presiding over an event in the Hippodrome surrounded by his children, courtiers and guards)
Credit: Image courtesy of Melissa Willan.

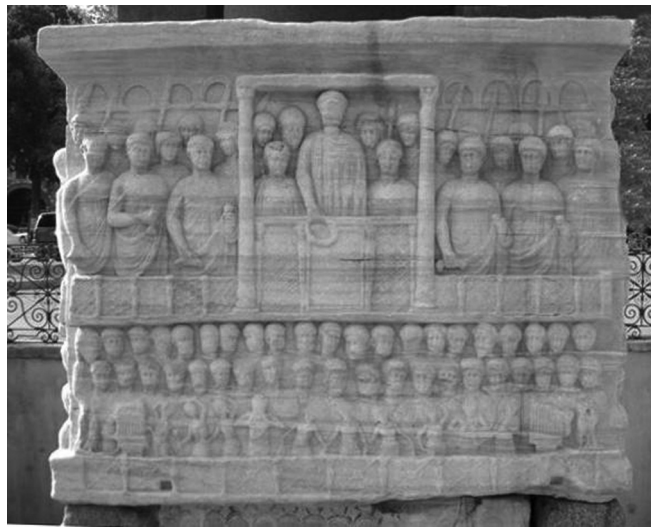

Figure A2.2 SOUTH-EAST FACE OF THE BASE OF THE THEODOSIAN OBELISK (Theodosius presiding over an imperial celebration)
Credit: Image courtesy of Melissa Willan.

immediately apparent. The emperor is the dominant figure in all the scenes and towers over all before him. He is displayed both as the city's protector and its supreme civil authority. The future of his dynasty is also presented on the western sides, where Theodosius is surrounded by his co-rulers in a "guarantee of Theodosian heirs to the throne".[31] The presentation of the vast majority of the figures in the different scenes is also instructive. We can identify types of people – such as guards, officials and citizens but not individuals. It has been persuasively argued that this was a deliberate move designed to "make the sculpture suggestive of the stability of the eternal Theodosian dynasty" and convey "the most effective ideal image of the *aeternitas* of Theodosian rule".[32]

Theodosius' decision to not only reside in Constantinople, but to revere it as symbolic of his dynasty's everlasting right to rule, would transform the city into the permanent imperial capital of the east. The emperor and his direct successors not only re-modelled the urban landscape of the city but created a schedule of celebrations and ritual interactions that would go on to define its political rhythms for centuries to come. For Theodosius, Constantinople was a source of power, an expression of his legitimacy and a place of safety and refuge for both him and his sons. Given this importance, it is fitting that although Theodosius would die almost 2,000 kilometres away in Milan, his body was quickly returned and interred in the city that he made his own. Theodosius may have been born in Spain but his real home was Constantinople. [33]

Notes

1 Errington (2006) 148 notes that many later writers retrospectively believed that Constantine always wanted Constantinople to be a capital. On the development of Constantinople under Constantine see Dagron (1974).
2 Croke (2010) 241. That said, a number of former emperors made a range of important contributions to the city's development. For example, Constantius II was instrumental in developing the city's Senate – see Errington (2006) 148ff.
3 Them. *Or.* 14.181d–183a.
4 Croke (2010) 242, fn. 5. See also Errington (2006) 161.
5 Errington (2006) 147 says that "when Theodosius decided to set up a long-term imperial residence in Constantinople, he was at the same time creating the necessary preconditions for a permanent symbiotic political relationship between autocratic ruler and the city population of the ruled, which no city of the empire had enjoyed in quite this way since the emperors ceased to reside in Rome." Coinage: See *RIC* IX, p. 311 for references to Constantinople as a reverse image.
6 Them. *Or.* 14.183c – ". . . and those whom you have named conscript fathers make worthy of the title". Croke (2010) 263 believes that "Theodosius was drawn into Constantinople in 380 by the city's senate, facilitated by the persuasive intervention of Themistius." I don't believe the embassy had that much effect on the emperor's thinking. As stated above, Constantinople was always going to be his chosen capital.
7 In this we see the beginning of a trend whereby the emperor would legislate specifically for the city far more frequently than any emperor before him, addressing a range of laws to the Prefect of Constantinople – see Errington (2006) 162–163.
8 Croke (2010) 244.
9 Jordanes *Get*. 143.
10 Maraval (2009) 290 and Leppin (2003) 188.
11 As noted by Errington (2006) 147.
12 Valens' accession: Amm. 26.4.3.
13 *Cons. Const.* 387.1
14 *CTh*. 2.8.19 and 2.8.20.
15 Athanaric: Zos. 4.34.4–5. See Croke (2010) 254 for a list of triumphs and victories celebrated in Constantinople.
16 Oddly, this anniversary would still be celebrated in the city centuries later – see Procopius *Wars*. 3.4.16. On the Golden Gate see Bardill (1999) and Jacobs (2012) 119.
17 *CTh*. 8.11.3. While this pronouncement was handed down to Florus, Praetorian Prefect of the East, meaning that it was meant to apply across the entire Praefecture, the reference to "eager multitudes" shows that Theodosius primarily had Constantinople in mind.
18 Croke (2010) 253. Julian had previously been buried in Tarsus – his wife Helena in Rome.
19 Croke (2010) 253 & Maraval (2009) 72.
20 Other examples included Paul, the former Bishop of Constantinople, the monk Isaac and the African martyrs Terentius and Africanus. See Croke (2010) 255–256 for references.
21 Croke (2010) 256.
22 Croke (2010) 256 however is correct when he says that "these processions served to consolidate further the status and dynastic prestige of Theodosius and his family".
23 Perhaps it was this project that led to him being praised for the care he took in terms of the grain supply – *Epit. Caes.* 48.17. Jacobs (2012) 149 (especially fn.123); Croke (2010) 257–258.
24 Croke (2010) 258.

25 Maraval (2009) 288 argues that the construction of the Forum began as late as 386. I have followed Croke (2010) 258 as it is likely that the new emperor would wish to make his mark quickly on the city. The forum was also called the *Forum Tauri* as it may have been constructed on land belonging to a former Praetorian Prefect of Italy and Africa, Taurus. It was situated approximately 500 metres from the Forum of Constantine. Lançon (2014) 261 says construction commenced in 384.
26 Speidel (1995) argues that it contains images of Theodosius' victory over the forces of Magnus Maximus.
27 Errington (2006) 146; Croke (2010) 259.
28 Maraval (2009) 290. Marcell. com. a.390.1 notes the date it was erected in Constantinople. Previously Constantius had ordered it to be shipped to Alexandria from where it would go on to Constantinople. Julian ordered this process to continue (Jul. *Ep.*48) but the ship carrying the obelisk was driven by a storm into Athens. Theodosius finally ordered the obelisk to Constantinople.
29 The Latin inscription specifically notes the victory over Magnus Maximus and his son Victor – the 'tyrannis'. See Maraval (2009) 291 and Safran (1993) 409–410.
30 Leppin (2003) 191–195.
31 Kiilerich (1998) 138 – the question of whether Valentinian II appears on the obelisk is a vexed one – see Leppin (2003)194ff and Maraval (2009) 292–293.
32 Kiilerich (1998) 138. The author goes further in seeing a deliberate east/west dynamic in the imagery on the obelisk (139ff). This position is not as persuasive as its very subtlety would negate any possible impact.
33 Soc. 6.1.3 and *Chron. Pasch*. a.395. Theodosius was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles (*Theoph*. 74.19).

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